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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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# India's GDP to grow between 6.8 & 7.2%: Eco Survey

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

India's economy is projected to grow between 6.8 and 7.2 per cent in the financial year beginning April, reaffirming its position as the world's fastest-growing major economy despite global volatility and trade risks, the Economic Survey 2025–26 said on Thursday.

The growth forecast for 2026–27 is lower than the 7.4 per cent estimated for the current financial year, which has been driven by strong consumption and investment. The Survey, tabled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Parliament, said the government remains on track to meet its fiscal deficit target of 4.4 per cent of GDP this year. Authored by Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran, the Survey noted that cumulative policy reforms have lifted India's medium-term growth potential closer to 7 per cent, from an earlier range of 6.5–6.8 per cent. It added that ongoing trade negotiations with the United States are expected to conclude during the year, helping ease external uncertainty, even as India faces steep tariffs on exports to the US. The Survey called for a National Input Cost Reduction strategy and highlighted robust tax collections, with non-corporate and individual taxes growing faster than other components. It underscored the importance of the new Income Tax legislation coming into force on April 1 to simplify compliance.

Flagging weaknesses in export policy, particularly in agriculture, the Survey said India could reach USD 100 billion in agri and food exports within four years but warned that frequent policy changes risk disrupting supply chains. *—PTI*

***>>>More on Pages 3, 5***

### Backs social media age bar for kids

Taking cues for social media ban for children, the Economic Survey on said age-based access to online platforms should be considered while also cutting down online teaching to avoid digital addiction. It called for schools to play a critical role in shaping digital habits of children and promoting simpler devices for educational content. "Platforms should be made responsible for enforcing age verification and age-appropriate defaults, particularly for social media, gambling apps, autoplay features, and targeted advertising," it said.

**Survey calls for nutrient-based tax on junk foods.**

**It says AI debt bomb may trigger global crisis worse than 2008.**

**Eco survey on G RAM G**

VB-G RAM G has been enacted due to dip in work demand under MGNREGA. "Person days" declined from a pandemic peak of **389.09** crore person days in FY21 to approximately **183.77** crore in FY26 (up to 31 Dec, 2025), a decline of more than **53%.**

# Divides society: SC stays new UGC rules

## Amid protests, Court says the new caste discrimination rules are 'vague'

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

Supreme Court on Thursday stayed the University Grants Commission's (UGC) 2026 equity regulations aimed at preventing caste-based discrimination on campuses. It called the framework "vague" with "very sweeping consequences" that could divide society.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi sought responses from the Centre and the UGC by 19 March. It ordered that the 2012 UGC regulations on discrimination will continue to operate.

The petitioners argued that the new rules narrowly define caste-based discrimination as harassment against SCs, STs and OBCs, excluding individuals from the general category. The bench flagged vagueness in Regulation 3(1)(c), which defines caste-based discrimination, and questioned the need for a separate definition.

The court also expressed concern over the potential for misuse of the regulations and asked why ragging had been excluded from their scope. Chief Justice Kant criticised proposals such as separate hostels for different castes, saying, "For God's sake, don't do this! We all used to stay together. Now there are inter-caste marriages too."

Advocates of the Allahabad High Court hold a protest against the UGC Bill 2026, which introduces stricter rules to curb caste-based discrimination in higher education, in Prayagraj, on Thursday *—PTI*

**WHAT DO THE NEW RULES SAY**

The 2026 regulations, notified on 13 January, were introduced following a September 2025 Supreme Court directive mandating a 10-point framework to institutionalise protection against caste discrimination. The court had ordered the creation of Equal Opportunity Centres (EOCs), Equity Committees, round-the-clock grievance mechanisms and campus equity squads, with representation from OBC, SC, ST and women.

**THE SHIFT**

The stay marks a shift from the court's earlier stance. In 2023, Supreme Court had flayed UGC and the Centre after they claimed existing 2012 guidelines were sufficient. The court had sought data on EOCs and complaints, only to find that many centres existed merely on paper, were headed by individuals accused of discrimination, and failed to protect complainants from retaliation. The regulations followed petitions by the mothers of Rohit Vemula and Payal Tadvi, who died by suicide allegedly due to caste discrimination.

**PROTESTS**

The stay comes amid nationwide protests. Around 100 students demonstrated outside the UGC in Delhi, with BJP leaders quitting in Uttar Pradesh. Several Right-wing groups such as the Savarna Sena have labelled the regulations a "black law".

Senior advocate Indira Jaising, who represented Vemula's mother, described the backlash against the rules as "a very upper-caste reaction". *—Salar News*

***>>>More on Page 3***

## STRAY DOGS: SC RESERVES VERDICT, PUTS ONUS ON NHAI

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

The Supreme Court on Thursday reserved its verdict on pleas seeking modification of its earlier orders on stray dogs. The bench heard on steps taken by states including Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, and NHAI on compliance with directions to remove stray animals from highways.

The court asked the Animal Welfare Board of India to expeditiously accept or reject NGO applications for shelters and birth control facilities, and sought early written submissions. The case arises from a suo motu action over rising dog-bite incidents. *—PTI*

## K'taka govt workers to wear Khadi once a month

**BENGALURU, 29 JAN**

With an aim to promote Khadi and support the Khadi industry, the Karnataka government has directed its 5 lakh workers to wear Khadi clothes on the first Saturday of every month. This new rule will come into effect on 21 April. This rule applies to all government employees, including those working in various boards and corporations, universities and aided institutions. The decision was taken at a meeting between Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh and officials of the Karnataka State Govt Employees Association (KSGEA). *—Salar News*

## Bangladesh repatriates 23 Indian fishermen

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

On Thursday, Bangladesh repatriated 23 Indian fishermen, while India released 128 Bangladeshi fishermen, along with their operable vessels, in a mutually agreed swap. The exchange was organised with humanitarian and livelihood concerns of fishing communities on both sides in mind, an Indian government statement said. The Indian fishermen had been arrested by Bangladeshi authorities after inadvertently crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line, while Bangladeshi fishermen were similarly detained by India. *—PTI*

## CM inaugurates 17th B'luru International Film Festival

**BENGALURU, 29 JAN**

State Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday inaugurated the 17th Bengaluru International Film Festival in the City, marking the start of the annual event.

The inaugural programme, held in front of the Vidhana Soudha, opened with a 'World Music Celebration' led by violinist Jyotsna Srikanth, followed by the formal ceremony. Actor Prakash Raj, the festival's ambassador, and actor Rukmini Vasanth were among the special guests.

Officials said Dutch film 'Fort Baggage' will be screened as the opening film. This year's edition is themed 'Women's Sensibility, the Voice of Equality', inspired by a line from late Kannada poet GS Shivarudrappa.

The festival runs till 6 February and will screen about 225 films from 65 countries at venues across the City. *—PTI*

## GOODBYE, AJIT

Mortal remains of Ajit Pawar being brought to Vidya Pratishthan for his funeral at Baramati on Thursday

## BLACK BOX OF CRASHED PLANE RECOVERED

The black box of the Learjet 45 aircraft that crashed near the Baramati airstrip on Wednesday has been recovered, the Civil Aviation Ministry said, marking a key step in the probe.

Despite its name, a Black Box is an orange device that records flight data and cockpit audio, helping investigators reconstruct events accurately.The recorder, found in the rear section, will be handed to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation for analysis.

The ministry said the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) is conducting a time-bound and transparent investigation into the crash that killed Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar and four others.

AAIB officials have seized airframe and engine logbooks, work orders and inspection records from VSR Ventures Private Limited, the Delhi-based operator.

Five people, including Pawar, his security officer and attendant, and cockpit crew members Sumit Kapur and Shambhavi Pathak, died when the aircraft crashed during a second landing attempt at the table-top airstrip.

Teams from AAIB and the DGCA reached the site on 28 January. *—PTI*

***>>>More on Page 3***

# BJP walks out of Assembly over K'taka govt's Gandhi ad

**BENGALURU, 29 JAN**

The Legislative Assembly erupted over a government advertisement criticising the Centre's VB-G RAM G Act. The Opposition accused the Siddaramaiah-led government of misusing taxpayers' money for "false propaganda".

Meanwhile, the Assembly session has been extended by four days till 4 February

On Thursday, BJP and JD(S) members alleged the ad disrespected Mahatma Gandhi, depicting him in conversation with a fictional character, Sangappa, shown in attire resembling an RSS uniform.

The advertisement, issued by the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department, criticised the repeal of the UPA-era MGNREGA and its replacement with the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act.

BJP MLA Suresh Kumar criticised the ad, saying it was wrong for government to issue such propaganda. JD(S) floor leader Suresh Babu flagged concerns over the message it sends. State BJP president BY Vijayendra and suspended MLA Basangouda Patil Yatnal called the ad "factually incorrect" and insulting to Gandhi.

Defending the move, Rural Development Minister Priyank Kharge said the government has the right to criticise a law he described as "anti-farmer, anti-labourer and anti-Constitution". Ministers Dinesh Gundu Rao and Sharan Prakash Patil said that the government will publish more ads calling out G RAM G. , Priyank pointed out that the BJP government in Gujarat had issued advertisements wishing Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his birthday and that the previous BJP government in Karnataka had released advertisements thanking him for the Covid-19 vaccines.

**SQUAD TO FLUSH OUT ILLEGAL BANGLADESHIS**

Secial squad will be formed to flush out illegal Bangladeshi immigrants from the State, Minister Ramalinga Reddy said. In Assembly, Reddy said the agents who bring Bangladeshis will also be arrested. *—PTI*

***>>>More on Page 2***

### 'Where is Bharat becoming Viksit?'

Here is what Minister MC Sudhakar said on Union Budget in Assemby: "Today, people are expecting another Budget, which... again, they are fooling the people of this country... A huge amount under the Jal Jeevan Mission is due... I think this is the standard way of handling things under 'cooperative federalism,' where they keep announcing programs but then decide unilaterally how much the states have to pay, while the Centre decides on the percentage it will cover... Finally, they end up not reimbursing the. This is happening with various schemes. They're going to keep fooling, and they keep introducing a lot of new initiatives; they keep changing the names... I don't know where 'Bharat' is becoming 'Viksit'.

**FOR BETTER WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

# *K'taka cops to get leave on b'days, anniversaries*

**BENGALURU, 29 JAN**

The State Police personnel will now be eligible for leave on their birthdays and wedding anniversaries, a move aimed at improving work-life balance and morale within the force.

Director General of Police MA Saleem issued a circular on Thursday directing all unit heads to grant leave whenever officers and staff seek time off on these occasions.

The circular said recognising personal milestones is important for personnel who operate under constant pressure and challenging conditions to ensure public safety and effective law enforcement.

Allowing leave on such days enables police personnel to spend quality time with their families, rejuvenate emotionally and maintain a healthier balance between professional duties and personal life, it noted. "This, in turn, boosts morale, reduces stress, and enhances overall job satisfaction and productivity," the circular said.

The order added that the measure acknowledges the sacrifices made by police personnel and is expected to foster loyalty, strengthen commitment within the force and contribute to better discipline and efficiency in service. Officials said the initiative reflects a more humane administrative approach towards frontline personnel across the State force. *—PTI*

## BEATING RETREAT

Bands of the armed forces perform at the Beating Retreat ceremony in New Delhi, marking the conclusion of the 77th Republic Day celebrations with music celebrating military valour, 'Vande Mataram' and Operation Sindoor's *-PTI*

FACEBOOK

## ED calls Cong MLA 'mastermind' of betting network

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) alleged that Congress MLA KC Veerendra "Puppy" and his associates are the masterminds behind a nationwide "illegal" online betting network. The ED has attached fresh assets worth Rs 177 crore under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

According to the ED, a provisional order has been issued to attach agricultural and residential plots, as well as some movable assets. The 51-year-old from the Chitradurga Assembly seat was arrested in August 2025 by the ED from Sikkim and is now out on bail. The money laundering probe stems from FIRs filed in multiple states alleging cheating, impersonation and extortion of the public through illegal online betting websites. *—PTI*

## Cook suspended for drunk dancing in hostel

**CHIKKABALLAPUR, 29 JAN**

A woman cook at a pre-matric girls' hostel in Chakavelu, Bagepalli taluk, run by the Social Welfare Department, has been suspended after a video surfaced showing her drinking alcohol and dancing on the hostel premises. The incident reportedly occurred 18 months ago but only came to light two days ago when colleagues reported her. Tej Ananda Reddy, Deputy Director of Social Welfare for Chikkaballapura, stated that the video went viral on the 27th of this month. An assistant director visited the hostel, and subsequent reports confirmed the incident took place on 6 June, 2024. The woman, Sarojamma C, was suspended; two outsourced cooks were dismissed, and the outsourcing agency was informed about it. The hostel houses a total of 65 inmates. *—SALAR NEWS*

## Elephant kills coffee estate guard in Kodagu

**MADIKERI, 29 JAN**

A 72-year-old man died after he was attacked by a wild elephant on Thursday at a coffee estate in Virajpet taluk of Kodagu district, officials said. The deceased, Abdul Latheef, a resident of Maliyeri village of Virajpet taluk, was working as a security guard in the coffee estate. The wild elephant entered the estate at around 1pm and suddenly attacked him, instantly killing him on the spot, forest department officials said. As per the Government Order, compensation of Rs 20 lakh is payable to the legal heir, the wife of the deceased, Nabeesa. Accordingly, the amount will be released to her, they added. Forest department officials have conducted a spot inspection and the shifted body to a hospital for a post-mortem examination. *—PTI*

## State to host job fair for persons with disabilities

**BENGALURU, 29 JAN**

The State government will organise an exclusive job fair for persons with disabilities, Minister Sharan Prakash Patil announced on Thursday, calling it a major step towards inclusive employmen. The event will be held at Kanteerava Stadium within the next three months, organised by the Department of Skill Development and Livelihood. Patil described the initiative as a significant government programme aimed at making persons with disabilities economically self-reliant through suitable employment opportunities. During the current FY, the KSDC is providing vocational training, tool kits, and employment to 1,000 candidates at a cost of Rs 3 crore. *—PTI*

# Never tapped Governor's phone calls: HM

## Says there is no need for government to tap anyone's phone like the BJP did in the past

**BENGALURU, 29 JAN**

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Thursday denied the Opposition BJP's allegation that the State government was tapping Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot's phone calls.

Speaking to reporters here he insisted that there was no need to phone tapping.

Replying to a question on the BJP's allegation made in the State assembly that the Congress government was tapping the Governor's phone, Parameshwara said the saffron party leaders' charge appeared as if Congress is doing what the BJP had done in the past.

"We neither tapped anyone's phone nor will we do it in the future. Also, there is no need for it," he said.

Home Minister Parameshwara said that BJP makes hundreds of allegations every day from dawn to dusk, which do not deserve reply *—X/PARAMESHWARA*

He added that the BJP makes hundreds of allegations everyday from dawn to dusk, which do not deserve reply.

During a discussion on the Governor winding up his recent address to the legislature in just three lines, Karnataka Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil said it seems as if Gehlot is getting instructions from the Centre over phone.

Latching on, the BJP said the Minister's statement indicated that the Governor's phones were tapped.

On BJP's allegation that a police officer in Chikmagaluru issued notice citing a law, which has not yet come into effect, Parameshwara said action has been taken against the officer.

"We are already training police officers on the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita. We have taken action against the PI for such a notice. It is not that we take action base on BJP's charges," he said. *—PTI*

## GEORGE REJECTS RESIGNATION REPORTS

**BENGALURU, 29 JAN**

Energy Minister KJ George on Thursday told the State Legislative Assembly that reports of his resignation were "far from the truth", asserting complete faith in CM Siddaramaiah.

The issue was raised by BJP MLA Sunil Kumar, who cited media reports alleging interference by the CM's Office and MLC Yathindra Siddaramaiah in George's affairs, including in Chikkamagaluru district, where he is minister in charge.

Rejecting the claims, George said he had not spoken to television channels and that there was "no question" of his resigning. He added that he had attended a Congress

Legislature Party meeting a day earlier.

Kumar said he was only referring to reports he had seen, adding, "We want you as the Minister". *—PTI*

# India's internet user base crosses 950M in 2025: IAMAI report

**BENGALURU, 29 JAN**

India's internet user base crossed 950 million in 2025, driven primarily by rapid rural adoption, short-video consumption and the growing use of artificial intelligence (AI), according to the Internet in India Report 2025 released by IAMAI on Thursday.

The report, prepared jointly by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and Kantar, said India now has 958 million active internet users, registering nearly eight per cent year-on-year growth and reinforcing its position as one of the world's fastest-evolving digital markets.

Rural India accounted for 57 per cent of active users, or around 548 million, and is growing at almost four times

the pace of urban India. "This growth of internet users continues to be led decisively by rural India," the report said, highlighting a structural shift in digital adoption.

AI has reached mass adoption, with 44 per cent of users engaging with AI-enabled features such as voice search, image-based search, and filters. Usage was highest among younger users, with 57 per cent in the 15–24 age group reporting AI usage.

Short-video platforms emerged as a key growth driver, with 588 million users consuming such content in 2025, rural users marginally outnumbering urban audiences.

The report also noted rising online shopping, led by quick commerce and social commerce. Despite the growth, 38 per cent of India's population remains offline, indicating significant headroom for further expansion. *—PTI*

## College student held for recording, leaking obscene content

**MADIKERI, 29 JAN**

A 21-year-old college student was arrested for allegedly recording and circulating obscene videos of women on social media platforms.

The accused, Mohammad Sawad, is a BBA student at a Bengaluru college and a resident in Kodagu district.

The matter came to light after MS Prasanna Bhat, president of the Kodagu Development Committee, received the alleged video clips on his WhatsApp number on 21 January from a resident of Napoklu, police said.

Bhat later filed a complaint at the police station, alleging the circulation of obscene photos and videos involving a young man and two women on social media platforms.

The complainant alleged that the clips showed a man engaging in sexual acts with two different women on different occasions. The visuals appeared to be self-recorded.

Subsequent verification revealed that the person seen in the videos was the accused student. A case has been registered. *—PTI*

**WARN OF STIR**

## Ambareesh fans seek apology from ex-MP over abusive remarks

**MYSURU, 29 JAN**

The All Karnataka Ambareesh Fans Association State President Beluru Somashekar asked former MP LR Shivaramegowda to tender an unconditional apology within a day for making allegedly derogatory and obscene remarks against late former minister and late actor MH Ambareesh.

Speaking to reporters in Mandaya on Thursday, Somashekar warned of massive protests in Bengaluru on 30 January if Shivaramegowda did not apologise.

In a leaked audio with a JD(S) worker that circulated on social media earlier this week, Shivaramegowda is heard purportedly making allegedly defamatory statements against Ambareesh as well as other political figures including former CM HD Kumaraswamy.

Shivaramegowda purportedly says that he was forced to join JD(S) – which Ambareesh was a part of and Kumaraswamy serves in – and says he was "cheated". He also criticises senior Congress leaders, including former MP G Madegowda. However, the remarks have triggered wi outrage among supporters and followers of both leaders. *—Salar News*

## Contractors' body warns of protest over Rs 37,370 crore pending bills

**BENGALURU, 29 JAN**

A contractors association on Thursday warned the Karnataka government that it would launch a statewide stir against the non-payment of pending bills worth Rs 37,370 crore.

Addressing a press conference, Karnataka State Contractors Association (KSCA) President R Manjunath alleged that the situation is dire in the State as many of them, especially the small contractors, are on the verge of ending their lives due to piling debts.

Manjunath said several

pleas and memoranda to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Ministers and senior officers have gone in vain and they are left with no other option but go one an indefinite strike.

"Our pleas have gone unnoticed in the last two-and-half years since the government came to power," the KSCA president rued. KSCA general secretary GM Nandakumar alleged that touts in the Urban Development Department are ruling the roost. According to him, corruption has gone up manifold in various departments compared to the previous government.

During the BJP rule, the KSCA had alleged that 40 per cent commission is being collected, giving ammunition to the Congress, which was in the opposition, to take on the ruling BJP then. *—PTI*

## Man kills pregnant daughter-in-law in Raichur village

**RAICHUR, 29 JAN**

A 24-year-old pregnant woman was allegedly murdered by her father-in-law in Chikkahanagi village of Sirwar taluk of Raichur following a family dispute, police said on Thursday.

The victim, Rekha Nagaraj, four months pregnant, was allegedly killed when her father-in-law Siddappa, 50, slit her throat during an argument over agricultural and household work. Despite fatal injuries, Rekha reportedly crawled out of the house, collapsing on the verandah where she died.

Raichur SP Arunangshu Giri told Salar News that Rekha initially shared cordial relations with her in-laws before disputes led the couple to live separately. They returned after her pregnancy, but tensions resurfaced, culminating in the murder. *—Salar News*

## Kannada actor Mayur Patel booked for drunken driving

**BENGALURU, 29 JAN**

Kannada film actor Mayur Patel has been booked for drunk driving after allegedly causing multiple road accidents near Domlur late at night, police said.

According to the police, a Toyota Fortuner, reportedly driven by Patel at high speed near the Command Hospital, lost control and rammed into three to four parked vehicles.

Patel was taken into custody and subjected to a medical test, which confirmed alcohol consumption while driving. Following a complaint, an FIR was filed with the Halasuru

Traffic police.

Police also found that the vehicle lacked valid insurance. Meanwhile, a video showing Patel stepping out of the car and saying, "I will fix whatever damage is done," has gone viral. The actor, known for Mani and Pepe, faces charges of rash and negligent driving. *—ANI*

**HM ASKED TO RESPOND**

# *Bagalkot pupils wash plates in sewage water*

**BAGALKOT, 29 JAN**

The Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (KSCPCR) has issued a show-cause notice to a government school in Alabal village in Bagalkot district over its students washing plates with sewage water.

The headmaster of the school, Nanda Bhimaji Kulkarni was asked to reply within three days or face disciplinary action.

The image of children from the Government Higher Primary School washing their plates using water from a pipe located beside an open drain after their mid-day meals, has gone viral, drawing criticism from the public.

The incident occurred due to the lack of proper drinking water and hand-washing facilities in the school.

The shocking scene was brought to light when a person, Shivalinga Ninganur on 28 January posted the viral photograph on his Facebook account. Within hours of being uploaded, people lashed out at the education department. He also tagged the local MLA in the post.

A viral video shows children from the Government Higher Primary School washing their plates using water from a pipe located beside an open drain after their mid-day meals *—SALAR*

Residents of Alabal demanded strict action against the teachers and officials responsible for this incident.

KSCPCR chairman Shashidhar S Kosambe told Salar News, "A suo motu complaint was registered against headmaster and teachers of the government school in Alabal and members of the School Development and Monitoring Committee based on the viral photo."

"The deputy director, school education department, field education officers and district child protection officers were instructed to visit the school and take necessary action," Kosambe added.

The deputy director of Public Instruction, Ajit Mannikeri told Salar News, "I have visited the school today to inspect the lack of adequate facilities for students at the school in Alabal." *—Salar News*

## THE JEWELLERY SHOW... FOR ALL CELEBRATIONS

The Jewellery Show will be held at the Sheraton Grand Hotel, Bengaluru, from 30 January to 1 February. The three-day exhibition will be inaugurated by Amrutha Prem, along with show organisers Jagadeesh and Hemalatha Jagadeesh.

Dubbed "One Show for All Celebrations," the exhibition will showcase an extensive range of gold, diamond and silver jewellery catering to diverse tastes and budgets. Over 50 leading and award-winning jewellers and designers from across India will present BIS hallmarked gold jewellery and internationally certified GIA and IGI graded diamonds. Visitors can also exchange old gold for new jewellery and avail after-sales services, making it a one stop shop for couples looking to tie the knot.

**Major Brands:** Anand Jewellers, BNR Gold & Diamonds, Diamond facets, Gajraj, MP Jewellers, Madanji Meghraj, MRK Zevar, Mukesh Jewellers, Navrathan & sons, Simha Jewellers, Sri Ganesh Diamonds, Art India Jewels, Luvera, Mangalam, Raji, Sankesh Surana, Saptosi, Varashree, Kohira, Bangalore Jewels, Esma Silver, Saanchis, Saroki, Soi Ombre, Style Aura.

**Star Attractions:** Arham (Kolkota), Sri Paramani, Shrihari by Diagems (New Delhi), Mehta Jewellers (Chennai), Sanzany (Mumbai), Vegasri, Shri Shukara, Panna Jewellers, Sammohana (Hyderabad), Sumangali Jewellers (Tamil Nadu), Mangal Gems, Banethi Exports (Jaipur), Purnima Jewellery, Srsta, Nityas (Vishakapatnam), Balaji Pearls (Chennai), Passion Jewellery, Madhan Gems. *—Advertorial*

PTI

## BJP's new Chief says Tagore won Nobel peace prize

**BENGAL, 29 JAN**

BJP's newly elected West Bengal president, Nitin Nabin, faced criticism after claiming that Rabindranath Tagore won the Nobel Peace Prize. Speaking at a party workers' gathering in Durgapur, Nabin said Tagore "taught the nation a new approach to education" and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, a statement that sparked immediate backlash. The Trinamool Congress demanded an apology, with spokesperson Kunal Ghosh pointing out that Tagore won the Nobel Prize for Literature for Gitanjali. Critics said the gaffe reflected BJP's recurring lack of understanding of Bengal's culture, citing earlier missteps by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, and other senior leaders. —*AGENCIES*

## KCR summoned in phone tapping case

**HYDERABAD, 29 JAN**

A A SIT of the Telangana police probing allegations of phone tapping during previous BRS regime on Thursday issued a notice to the party chief K Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR) for his appearance on 30 January. However, the former CM sought a fresh date and said he will cooperate. The Special Investigation Team (SIT) told Rao that since he is aged above 65, and as per Section 160 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, he may either come to the police station or inform a place convenient to him in Hyderabad. KCR said he is busy with the nominations for the 11 February municipal elections. —*PTI*

# Maharashtra bids adieu to Ajit

## Thousands gather in Baramati to pay last respect; ZP elections postponed

**BARAMATI, 29 JAN**

Chants of "Ajit Dada Amar Rahe" (Ajit Dada is immortal) rent the air on Thursday as Maharashtra bid a final and tearful farewell to late deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar.

The 66-year-old NCP Chief, popularly known as 'Dada' in Baramati, was cremated with full state honours at the Vidya Pratishthan college ground in Baramati, a day after he along with four others died when the chartered plane carrying them crashed on Wednesday. The college was founded by the Pawar family.

As thousands gathered to pay their last respects, Ajit's sons, Parth and Jay, lit the funeral pyre in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP President Nitin Nabin, and Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis.

Sharad Pawar, Ajit's uncle, sat quietly watching a legacy he helped build become a memory. Ajit's cousin Supriya Sule, the NCP (SP) Lok Sabha member from Baramati, stood by his wife Sunetra, who is a Rajya Sabha member.

Dozens of other leaders across party lines paid tribute to Maharashtra's longest serving Deputy Chief Minister, including former CM Uddhav Thackeray and MNS chief Raj Thackeray.

Ajit's plane crashed barely 200 metres away from the airport. The aircraft was cleared for landing after a go-around due to poor visibility, but having finally received a clearance, it did not give any readback to the ATC. Moments later burst into flames.

The others killed were Captain Sumit Kapoor, who had a flying experience of 15,000 hours, co-pilot Capt Shambhavi Pathak, with 1,500 hours of flying experience, Personal Security Officer Vidip Jadhav and flight attendant Pinky Mali. Aircraft maker Bombardier said it will support the authorities investigating the crash of its Learjet 45 plane.

In lieu of Ajit's death, voting for 12 zilla parishads and 125 panchayat samitis in Maharashtra will now take place on 7 February, instead of 5 February as announced, the state poll panel said. —*PTI*

Mortal remains of Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar being brought to Vidya Pratishthan college ground for his funeral, at Baramati in Pune district on Thursday —*PTI*

> The untimely demise... has created such a void in Maharashtra's politics that it will not be possible to fill it for a long time.
>
>
>
> -Amit Shah, Home Minister

## NCP leaders bat for Sunetra to take over

Several NCP leaders on Thursday said Ajit Pawar's wife, Sunetra Pawar, said that should be given a state cabinet berth and lead the outfit, which is a constituent of the ruling Mahayuti alliance led by the BJP.

Senior NCP leader and FDA Minister Narhari Zirwal said it is people's wish that "vahini" (sister-in-law) Sunetra, a Rajya Sabha member, be inducted in the state cabinet.

"We will talk to our leadership about it and take a decision," he said.

To a question on the possible merger with Opposition NCP (SP), he noted, "The two factions are already together (for local body polls). Everyone has realised that there was no point in remaining scattered and we have to be together."

Another NCP leader and Ajit confidante, Pramod Hindurao, maintained Sunetra should carry forward the legacy.

However, some NCP (SP) leaders have said the merger has already been finalised.

Sunetra, who fought the 2024 Lok Sabha polls on an NCP ticket, had lost to Supriya Sule, NCP (SP) working president and Sharad Pawar's daughter, in Baramati. —*PTI*

### Pilot Shambhavi laid to rest in Delhi

A pin-drop silence enveloped Delhi's Safdarjung Enclave as the mortal remains of young pilot Shambhavi Pathak were brought to her home. Pathak, around 25 years old, was cremated in the presence of close relatives and friends. Her mother is a teacher at the Air Force Bal Bharati School and her father a retired Army pilot.

### Ajit's security officer cremated in Satara

The last rites of Vidip Jadhav, the Personal Security Officer to Ajit Pawar, were performed in Satara district, Maharashtra, on Thursday. Jadhav is a 2009-batch constable with the Mumbai Police. A resident of Thane City, Jadhav was posted at the Special Protection Unit of Mumbai Police. He is survived by his wife and two children.

### Goodbye flight attendant Pinky Mali

The last rites of flight attendant Pinky Mali, were performed on Thursday at central Mumbai's Shivaji Park crematorium, officials said. Pinky Mali's family broke down in grief as they gathered around her funeral pyre. Pinky was 29-years-old and had got married three years ago. She grew up in Prabhadevi in central Mumbai.

### Captain Sumit Kapoor cremated in Delhi

Captain Sumit Kapoor was cremated in Delhi's Punjabi Bagh crematorium. Mourners remembered the 50-year-old as a warm-hearted neighbour. His close friend, Araving Kumar, said Kapoor was deeply involved in the community and always willing to help others. He is survived by a wife and a son, who is also a pilot.

# Soon, world will buy Indian without thinking: Nirmala

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday highlighted that the strategy outlined in the Economic Survey will ensure the world moves from "thinking about buying Indian" to "buying Indian without thinking."

"It is in this context that our government has been focusing on deregulation and strengthening the manufacturing sector in the country through various measures," she said on X.

"India's industrial sector has shifted from traditional manufacturing to high-tech capabilities, resilience, and global integration. Initiatives like the National Logistics Policy and the Unified Logistics Interface Platform are actively improving logistics efficiency and reducing transaction costs, thereby directly boosting the competitiveness of Indian manufacturing," she said. As highlighted in the Economic Survey, she said, India's growth strategy is anchored in strengthening human capital, with measurable gains in both education and health outcomes. —*ANI*

### DISCUSSED IN PARLIMENT

**Flights cancelled:** 6,890 flights were cancelled in December affecting more than 9.66 lakh passengers, with IndiGo accounting for more than 82 per cent of the total cancelled service, govt data showed.

**On Bangladesh:** India continues to monitor reports of attacks against minorities in Bangladesh, and New Delhi has "consistently raised" the issue with the authorities in Dhaka, Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh told the Rajya Sabha.

**Jal Jeevan:** Action was taken against 4,000 people for irregularities in the Jal Jeevan mission across India, Union Jal Shakti Minister CR Patil told the Lok Sabha.

# Mixed reaction from Oppn parties on SC's UGC ruling

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

The Supreme Court's stay on the recent UGC equity regulations aimed at preventing caste-based discrimination on campuses was largely welcomed by Opposition parties on Thursday, with leaders from the BSP, Congress and TMC welcoming it, while the CPI(ML) Liberation said it is "deeply appalled" by the observations.

Similarly, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin noted that regulations were meant to address that "deep rooted discrimination and institutional apathy."

> This decision is significant in protecting India's cultural unity and Sanatan values
>
>
>
> -Giriraj Singh, Union Minister

He said that after the BJP came to power in the Centre, there has been a noticeable rise in attacks against SC/ST students on campuses.

Meanwhile, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) Chief Mayawati noted that the new regulations had created an atmosphere of tensions and noted that there were protests across the country against the UGC guidelines. She welcomed the apex court's ruling.

The CPI(ML) Liberation, however, said the apex court's observations reflected a "myopic attitude". It questioned how the ruling would deliver justice for "institutional murder of Rohith Vemula or Dr Payal Tadvi or the racist killing of Angel Chakma". —*PTI*

## OPS says want to return to AIADMK, EPS says no thanks

**PERIYAKULAM, 29 JAN**

Expelled AIADMK leader O Panneerselvam, engaged in a leadership tussle with party general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami, announced he was willing to rejoin the party but was swiftly rejected by EPS. Panneerselvam, who launched the AIADMK Workers' Rights Retrieval Committee and has called for a united AIADMK, declared in Periyakulam that he was ready to return.

He asked, "I am ready to join the AIADMK. Are T T V Dhinakaran (AMMK General Secretary) and Palaniswami ready to accept?"

Dhinakaran, also expelled, recently returned to the NDA, opposing EPS, who was backed by BJP for the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections. Panneerselvam told reporters his movement aimed to retrieve AIADMK cadre rights through legal action.

In Salem, EPS confirmed that the general council had collectively expelled Panneerselvam in 2022, stating, "It was not my decision." He added there was "no chance of re-admitting him". —*PTI*

## VIJAY'S FATHER URGES CONGRESS TO JOIN TVK ALLIANCE

**CHENNAI, 29 JAN**

Actor-politician Vijay's father, SA Chandrasekhar, has urged the Congress to form an alliance with Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) to restore its past influence in Tamil Nadu. Speaking after attending a marriage in Tiruvarur, Chandrasekhar said that TVK was considering supporting Congress in the upcoming Assembly elections.

He added that Congress has a legacy and Vijay is ready to support them to regain their former glory. Chandrasekhar suggested that the Congress should forge electoral ties with TVK to enhance its relevance in Tamil Nadu. He said Vijay had the potential to contest elections independently and win. During his public outreach, Vijay criticised the DMK, which he called TVK's political opponent, and the AIADMK, branding them corrupt, while also opposing the BJP, which he described as his ideological enemy. TNCC chief K Selvaperunthagai dismissed Chandrasekhar's proposal, stating that Rahul Gandhi is providing the necessary support, and reaffirmed the party's position within the INDIA bloc. —*PTI*

## Clean chit to LG Saxena in Patkar defamation case

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

A Delhi court on Thursday acquitted Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena in a 25-year-old criminal defamation case filed by activist Medha Patkar. It held that she failed to substantiate her allegations and that the case was riddled with "irreconcilable contradictions".

The dispute dates back to 2000, when Patkar filed a complaint against Saxena over an advertisement published in The Indian Express titled 'The True Face of Medha Patkar and her Narmada Bachao Andolan'. The complaint was initially lodged in Ahmedabad and transferred to Delhi in 2010 on the Supreme Court's directions. At the time, Saxena headed an Ahmedabad-based NGO, the Council for Civil Liberties. He had also filed two defamation cases against Patkar over alleged derogatory remarks made on television and in a press statement.

Judicial Magistrate First Class Raghav Sharma observed that the advertisement primarily criticised the activities of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) and that collective criticism of an organisation could not amount to Patkar's personal defamation. It said Patkar's name appeared only in the headline and not in the body of the advertisement, which referred to organisational issues such as alleged sharing of documents, hawala transactions and non-registration. The court noted inconsistencies in Patkar's testimony, particularly regarding a letter sent to foreign nationals, and discrepancies between her account and that of a prosecution witness. —*PTI*

### THAW IN TIES?

# *All is good: Tharoor after meeting Rahul and Kharge*

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Thursday met party president Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi regarding his grievances, after which he said "all is good" and "we are all on the same page," signalling a rapprochement with his party ahead of the Kerala Assembly polls.

The meeting in Kharge's chamber in Parliament House complex lasted for about an hour and a half.

"We had a discussion with my two leaders. We had a very good, constructive, positive discussion," Tharoor said. "All is good and we are moving together on the same page, what more can I say."

Asked if the issue of chief ministerial face for Kerala polls was discussed, Tharoor said that was never the issue.

Congress Leader Shashi Tharoor, party President Mallikarjun Kharge and party leader Rahul Gandhi meet in New Delhi on Thursday —*PTI*

"I am not interested in being the candidate for anything. I am already an MP, and I have the confidence of my voters," he said.

The meeting comes ahead of the Kerala Assembly polls which are very crucial for the Congress as it seeks to wrest power from the Left after 10 years. Last week, Tharoor had skipped a key strategy meeting of the party for the upcoming Kerala polls as he was believed to be upset over Rahul not properly acknowledging his presence at a recent event and repeated attempts by state leaders to "sideline" him. —*PTI*

## India appreciates US efforts on Gaza conflict at UN

**UNITED NATIONS, 29 JAN**

India has expressed appreciation to the United States for addressing the long-standing Gaza conflict, recognising recent progress in implementing UN Security Council Resolution 2803. India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish, highlighted that India notes the efforts to end the Gaza conflict and commended the US's role. Resolution 2803, adopted in November, endorses President Trump's 'Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict', aiming to establish a deradicalised, terror-free Gaza and promote redevelopment for its people.

The resolution also welcomes the creation of a 'Board of Peace' to coordinate Gaza's reconstruction. Harish also called for safe humanitarian access. India reaffirmed its support for a sovereign Palestinian state. —*PTI*

# SC to EC on SIR: Show 'logical discrepancies' list

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the Election Commission to display names of voters placed under the "logical discrepancies" list during the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls at gram panchayat bhavans, ward offices and block-level offices.

A bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi issued the directions while hearing pleas alleging arbitrariness and procedural lapses in the exercise.

The court noted that EC notices classify cases as mapped, unmapped and logical discrepancies, the last involving mismatches such as fathers' names, parents' ages, large age gaps between generations or more than six children.

To ensure fairness, the bench allowed affected voters to submit documents or objections through authorised representatives. It ordered that documents be accepted at panchayat bhavans or taluka offices and granted an additional 10 days from the date of list display for submissions. —*PTI*

### SIR notice to ex-national footballer

Ex national footballer Mehtab Hossain was summoned for a hearing during the SIR in West Bengal. The midfielder, who captained both Kolkata giants, Mohun Bagan and East Bengal, asked why sportspersons who have represented the country to prove their citizenship. He is registered in Mallikpur but lives in Kolkata.

## Two Maoists killed in Bijapur encounter

**BIJAPUR, 29 JAN**

At least two Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Thursday, a police official said. The exchange of fire broke out at 7 am in a forest in the southern part of the district when a District Reserve Guard team was out on an anti-Naxalite operation. Bodies of two Maoists, an AK-47 rifle, a 9mm pistol, arms and explosives were recovered. The operation is continuing. Twenty-two Maoists have been killed in the state this year so far.—*PTI*

ANI

## Devotees demand probe into Sadhvi's death

**JODHPUR, 29 JAN**

A preacher died after she collapsed while being treated for fever at her ashram in Rajasthan, angering devotees who demanded a fair investigation into her suspicious death. A purported suicide note posted on her official Instagram handle after her death raised questions. Police said the 25-year-old was brought to a private hospital and declared dead. She collapsed after an injection at the ashram. In her last post on Instagram, she referred to an "agnipariksha" (trial by fire) she was denied and added that she hoped for "justice" after her death. This was posted a few hours after her death on Wednesday. The sadhvi had approached the police around six months back, alleging that she was being blackmailed over a "doctored" video by some of her staff. They had demanded Rs 20 lakh for scrapping the video, which was circulated online. Police had then arrested one Jogendra, who used to install the sound system.—*PTI*

PTI

## Navy adjudged best marching contingent

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

The Navy was adjudged the best marching contingent among the three wings of the armed forces at this year's Republic Day parade, officials said. Maharashtra won the top prize in the States and Union Territories tableau category for its Ganeshotsav-themed presentation, while the culture ministry's tableau marking 150 years of Vande Mataram topped the ministries and departments category. The Navy contingent had 144 personnel marching along Kartavya Path, symbolising it as a progressive and strong maritime force. The awards will be presented on 30 January.—*PTI*

ANI

## Bengal fire toll now 21, 28 still missing

**KOLKATA, 29 JAN**

The toll in a fire near Kolkata has risen to 21 after 13 more bodies were recovered, while 28 people are still missing, police said on Thursday. Prohibitory orders were imposed in the area ahead of a proposed visit by BJP leaders. The blaze gutted two godowns and a momo manufacturing unit in South 24 Parganas. Police said the toll could rise further. DNA profiling of recovered bodies will begin to establish identities, as many are severely charred—*PTI*

# With eye on polls, LDF presents populist budget

## ASHA workers get hike, Rs 1 K for jobless

**THIRU'PURAM, 29 JAN**

Kerala Finance Minister K N Balagopal unveiled a people-focused budget for 2026-27, promising a massive Rs 14,500 crore boost to help social security pensioners and fund new community programmes.

He also announced the 12th Pay Revision Commission in the budget, continuing the long-standing policy of reviewing government employees' salaries every five years.

Balagopal announced that the honorarium of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) and Anganwadi workers has been hiked by Rs 1,000 per month and that of Anganwadi helpers by Rs 500.

He also increased the allocations for the rural employment scheme by Rs 1,000 crore, life and health insurance schemes for all categories, including school children, and free degree education for students in arts and science colleges.

The budget also announced an allocation of Rs 100 crore for the initial works in connection with the Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) from Thiruvananthapuram to Kasaragod that was given in-principle approval by the cabinet on Wednesday.

Kerala Finance Minister KN Balagopal presents the Budget in the Legislative Assembly in Thiruvananthapuram —*PTI*

The 12th Pay Revision Commission is expected to submit its report within three months. The budget also confirmed that all pending DA and Dearness Relief (DR) arrears for employees and pensioners will be cleared.

He announced the Assured Pension Scheme, replacing the contributory National Pension System (NPS) for eligible employees.

Under the scheme, retirees will receive up to 50 per cent of their last drawn salary, with DR included.

He announced that Rs 3 crore will be allocated to set up specialised menopause clinics in district hospitals.

The new clinics aim to provide consultations, mental health counselling, screenings for heart, bone, and hormonal health, along with medicines and guidance.

The Leader of the Opposition in the Kerala Assembly, V D Satheesan, said the document showed that the government is promising to do what it had failed to do over the last decade. — *PTI*

**SC HEARING AGAIN ON 2 FEB**

## Wangchuk denies allegations about overthrowing Centre

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, who is under detention in Jodhpur Central Jail, denied in the Supreme Court on Thursday allegations that he made a statement asking people to overthrow the government like in the the Arab Spring, emphasising that he has the democratic right to criticise and protest.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Wangchuk's wife Gitanjali Angmo, submitted before Justices Aravind Kumar and P B Varale that the police relied on a selective video to mislead the detaining authority.

"What the police say is that he said that if the Centre will not give statehood, he will overthrow the government like the Arab Spring. He does not say so. I will give the transcription (of the video)," Sibal told the bench.

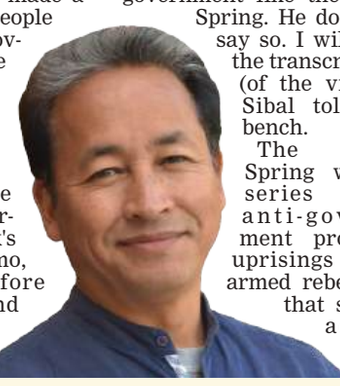
The Arab Spring was a series of anti-government protests, uprisings and armed rebellions that spread across the Middle East and North Africa around 2010 and 2018.

Sibal also refuted that Wangchuk had said in one interview that the people of Ladakh would not help the Indian Army during war if the government did not help.

"False, that is the problem with this case. They have misled the detaining authority. I have a link to the video itself where he is praising the government and the prime minister," Sibal said.

Sibal also denied allegations against Wangchuk that he made derogatory remarks against Hindu deities and added that some IT cell falsely projected it.

The hearing will continue on 2 February. — *PTI*



## SUPREME COURT REFUSES TO ASK GOVTS TO ENACT LAWS FOR DOMESTIC HELPS

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

The Supreme Court on Thursday refused to entertain a PIL seeking a comprehensive legal framework and enforcement of minimum wages for domestic workers, saying it cannot issue a writ asking the Centre and states to consider amending existing laws.

The SC also observed that trade unionism has been largely responsible for stopping industrial growth in the country.

While acknowledging the "plight" of domestic helps, CJI Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi maintained that the judiciary cannot encroach upon the legislative domain. It, however, asked petitioners, including the Penn Thozhilalargal Sangam, a domestic workers' union, to highlight the plight of domestic helps to states and the Centre. — *PTI*

## CJI launches digital drive to improve courts' efficiency

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

The Chief Justice of India, Surya Kant, announced on Thursday a series of initiatives aimed at enhancing the efficiency of the judiciary and reducing the pendency of cases.

Trial court orders and HC directions will be digitally updated across courts, creating a repository of cases pending in HCs and the SC. The CJI also launched an online payment system for admin purposes. — *PTI*

## HIV: Jharkhand probe clears blood bank

**CHAIBASA, 29 JAN**

A probe by the Jharkhand health department has concluded that the HIV infection of three members of a family was not linked to blood supplied by the Chaibasa Sadar Hospital blood bank, officials said on Thursday.

Director-in-Chief of Health Services Dr Sidharth Sanyal said a two-member team carried out a detailed investigation into allegations that a woman was infected after

receiving blood during a caesarean delivery at the hospital in 2023. The team was led by Health Services Deputy Director Dr Pramod Kumar Sinha.

The woman was given one unit of blood during the procedure, while another unit remained unused. Records from the hospital blood bank were examined and the donor of the used blood, traced to Sonua in West Singhbhum district, was found HIV-negative.

The issue came to light in June 2025 when the woman tested HIV-positive during a routine check-up in her second pregnancy. Her husband was subsequently found to be infected, and on 2 January 2026, their elder child fell ill and also tested HIV positive.

Based on the findings, the health department ruled out any link between the family's infection and the Chaibasa Sadar Hospital blood bank.

Leader of the Opposition Babulal Marandi demanded a CBI probe into the functioning of the hospital and its blood bank, alleging serious lapses. Hospital in-charge and West Singhbhum civil surgeon Dr Bharti Minz said the family had been assured medical help as per norms. —*PTI*

## BJP sweeps mayoral polls in Chandigarh

**CHANDIGARH, 29 JAN**

BJP councillor Saurabh Joshi was elected mayor of the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation on Thursday as the party swept all three key civic posts. In a three-cornered contest, Joshi secured 18 votes, defeating Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) candidate Yogesh Dhingra, who received 11 votes, and Congress nominee Gurpreet Singh Gabi, who polled seven.

The election was conducted through a show of hands instead of the secret ballot system. After raising their hands, councillors also gave verbal confirmation before the presiding officer, Ramneek Singh Bedi, who oversaw the mayoral poll.

The Chandigarh Municipal Corporation has a 35-member House, comprising 18 BJP councillors, 11 from the AAP and six from the Congress.

The city's Member of Parliament also has voting rights as an ex officio member. Sitting Congress MP Manish Tewari supported his party's candidate, Gurpreet Singh Gabi, during the mayoral vote. The Congress and AAP did not form an alliance for this year's mayoral election.

After Joshi was declared mayor, he conducted elections for the posts of senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor. The Congress abstained from these elections, with all six Congress councillors and MP Tewari leaving the House after the mayoral vote. — *PTI*

## Andaman bags best UT award in health scheme

**SRI VIJAYA PURAM, 29 JAN**

Andaman and Nicobar Islands has been awarded the Best Union Territory in the 'Treatment of Beneficiaries' category under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, an official said. The award was conferred for effective implementation of the scheme.

Chief Secretary Chandra Bhushan Kumar said, "I would like to commend the entire team for effectively implementing AB-PMJAY."

Dr P Lal said the structured compensation scheme offers Rs 40,000 for transport and Rs 1,000 as wages under the scheme. — *PTI*

Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma addressing reporters —*PTI*

## Himanta defends 'Miya' remark citing SC order

**GUWAHATI, 29 JAN**

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said that those attacking him for his remarks on 'Miyas', the word used for illegal Bangladeshi Muslims, should read the Supreme Court's order mentioning the "silent demographic invasion" of the state.

The CM said that 'Miyas' were being 'harassed' during the Special Revision (SR) of electoral rolls, as they cannot be allowed to vote in Assam, and claimed that no Assamese were facing any problem. Opposition parties had criticised this comment.

"Those who are attacking my remarks on 'Miya' should read what the SC said about Assam," Sarma said on X.

He quoted from the SC judgment while scrapping the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983 (IMDT Act) in 2005. "The silent invasion of Assam may result in the loss of lower Assam. The influx of Bangladeshis is turning these districts into a Muslim-majority region. It will only be a matter of time when a demand for their merger with Bangladesh is made. Loss of lower Assam will cut North East from India," he pointed out. — *PTI*

## Three held for killing Bihar family in Chennai

**CHENNAI, 29 JAN**

The Chennai police on Thursday arrested three men for the murder of a Bihar migrant worker, his wife and their two-year-old son. The case surfaced after the man's body was found stuffed in a gunny bag in Adyar on 26 January.The victims are Gaurav Kumar, 24, his wife Minikumari, 22, and their toddler, from Nalanda. The family had returned to Chennai in search of work and were staying in the Taramani area.

Police said the accused, also migrants from Bihar, were drinking with Kumar on the night of 25 January when they allegedly attempted to rape his wife. When Kumar resisted, he was beaten to death with iron rods, following which the woman and child were killed.

During interrogation, the accused confessed. The child's body was recovered from the Buckingham Canal, while the suspects claimed the woman's body was dumped near the Indira Nagar MRTS station.

The incident triggered political reactions, with AIADMK and BJP leaders blaming the DMK government over law and order. — *PTI*

## CBI raids in Kolkata over Rs 1,000 crore bank fraud

**KOLKATA, 29 JAN**

The CBI launched searches on Thursday in Kolkata in connection with its probe into an alleged bank fraud involving around Rs 1,000 crore, an official said. The searches are underway simultaneously at the offices and residences of the promoters of a Kolkata-based finance company, he said. Central forces have been deployed at the sites where raids are going on, he said. "The searches are being carried out in several locations in connection with a bank fraud involving a public sector bank," a CBI official said. The bank had accused an East Kolkata-based finance company of siphoning off funds under the guise of availing loans. The diversion took place between 2014 and 2020. Allegations are against two directors and a firm. Loans of Rs 730.82 crore and Rs 260.20 crore were taken and defaulted on repayments. A complaint was lodged in 2023 and a case was registered. — *PTI*

ANI

## Telemetry device falls from sky, creates panic

**RAISIN, 29 JAN**

- Residents of Markhandi saw the device falling from the sky on Wednesday. The device was a gadget used for weather studies

Radiosonde, an atmospheric parameter-measuring instrument with 'Malaysia Meteorological Department' written on it, was found in a village in Madhya Pradesh's Raisen district, triggering panic among locals, police said on Thursday.

Fearing it could be an explosive, villagers alerted the police, who confirmed it was a telemetry instrument. Residents of Markhandi village spotted the device falling from the sky on Wednesday evening, an official said. Radiosonde is a battery-powered telemetry instrument carried into the atmosphere usually by a weather balloon that measures atmospheric parameters.

"Locals found the device falling from the sky in a residential area, creating panic," Begamganj SDOP Sonal Gupta said.

Police secured the area and seized it. "The device clearly bears the inscription 'Malaysia Meterological Department'," she said. Police believe winds and streams carried it thousands of kilometres to India. Villagers were asked not to touch such devices. — *PTI*

**'THE BA***DS OF BOLLYWOOD'**

## *HC refuses to hear Sameer Wankhede's plea*

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

- Wankhede said there was "defamatory content" in the series aimed at settling scores with him to avenge the arrest of Shah Rukh's son Aryan in a drug case

The Delhi High Court ruled that it has no jurisdiction to hear IRS officer Sameer Wankhede's lawsuit alleging defamation by 'The Ba***ds of Bollywood' series produced by actor the Shah Rukh Khan-owned Red Chillies Entertainment Pvt Ltd.

Refusing to entertain the lawsuit on Thursday, Justice Purushaindra Kumar Kaurav said the parties stayed in Mumbai and the alleged offence also occurred there, leaving the courts in Mumbai with the power to deal with the plea.

Wankhede said there was "defamatory content" in the web series aimed at settling personal scores with him to avenge the arrest of Shah Rukh Khan's son Aryan Khan in a 2021 drugs case.

He claimed the series written and directed by Aryan Khan is aimed at maligning him.

Wankhede sued Red Chillies and Netflix seeking an injunction as well as Rs 2 crore in damages, which he wanted to be donated to the Tata Memorial Cancer Hospital.

Wankhede claimed that the series has a character showing a middle finger, after reciting the slogan "Satyamev Jayate," which is part of the National Emblem.

This act constitutes a grave violation of the provisions of the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, it said.

Red Chillies Entertainment and OTT Platform Netflix contended that the show was just a satire on Bollywood.

It said the officer was engaging in "forum shopping," choosing courts according to one's convenience, as Sameer Wankhede stays in Mumbai and the defendant company's registered office is also in Mumbai. — *PTI*

## India leads global IPOs as primary mkts stay resilient

India's primary capital markets delivered a robust performance in FY26, emerging as a global leader in IPOs despite global uncertainty, the Economic Survey said. It cited strong macro fundamentals, domestic investor participation and Sebi reforms for market resilience amid trade disruptions, volatile flows and uneven earnings. Equity markets stabilised after early FY26 pressures from US tariffs and weak Q1 earnings, aided by tax cuts, GST reforms, easing monetary policy, receding inflation and improved Q2 performance. Between April and December 2025, the Nifty 50 rose 11.1 per cent and the Sensex 10.1 per cent. Primary market mobilisation reached Rs 10.7 lakh crore, with IPO volumes up 20 per cent year-on-year growth. *—PTI*

## Survey calls for re-examining RTI Act

The Economic Survey on Thursday called for re-examining the nearly two-decade-old Right to Information (RTI) Act to exempt confidential reports and draft deliberations, saying current provisions constrain governance. It stressed the RTI Act, 2005 was never meant to satisfy idle curiosity or micro-manage government, but to promote transparency, accountability and democratic participation. Without diluting its spirit, the Survey suggested aligning the law with global best practices by shielding brainstorming notes, working papers, draft comments, and sensitive service records until decisions are final. It also floated a narrowly defined ministerial veto, subject to parliamentary oversight, noting India's RTI regime is more expansive than many global counterparts and potentially discourages candid internal debate. *—PTI*

# 'Falling rupee is victim of geopolitics & a power gap'

### Survey claims that the trade deficit in goods is hurting rupee

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

As Rupee touches an all-time low, the Economic Survey 2025-2026 sheds light on the main reasons for the rupee's depreciation: it's a victim of geopolitics and a strategic power gap

Tabled in Parliament by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman ahead of the Union Budget, the Survey noted that the rupee was the worst-performing Asian currency in 2025 and has begun 2026 on a weak footing. The currency hit a lifetime low of 92.00 in early trade on Thursday, after settling at 91.99 on Wednesday. It had earlier touched an intraday low of 92 on 23 January.

According to the Survey, India's goods trade deficit, which is not fully offset by services exports and remittances, makes the economy dependent on foreign capital inflows to maintain balance-of-payments stability. "When they run drier, Rupee stability becomes a casualty," it said.

"Of course, it does not hurt to have an undervalued rupee in these times, as it offsets to some extent the impact of higher American tariffs on Indian goods, and there is no threat of higher inflation from higher-priced crude oil imports now. However, it does cause investors to pause," the survey said.

The document stressed that the Rupee's weakness does not reflect India's underlying economic strength. Growth remains robust, inflation is under control, banks and corporate balance sheets are healthy, external liabilities are low, and liquidity and credit growth are supportive. "The rupee, therefore, is punching below its weight," it said, calling for a closer examination of investor reluctance.

The Survey also flagged India's strategic challenges, citing the Lowy Institute's Power Gap Index, where India scored minus 4.0, the lowest in Asia excluding Russia and North Korea.

Separately, the Survey cautioned that growth driven disproportionately by domestic demand and credit-fuelled consumption, without matching productivity and export gains, tends to sustain a weaker currency and higher capital costs. It called for lowering the cost of capital through deeper bond markets, improved risk pricing, broader institutional participation and reforms that strengthen production and exports. *—PTI*

The currency hit a lifetime low of 92 in early trade on Thursday *—AI*

> **Of course, it does not hurt to have an undervalued rupee in these times, as it offsets to some extent the impact of higher American tariffs on Indian goods, and there is no threat of higher inflation from higher-priced crude oil imports now**
>
> -Economic Survey

FARMERS

# Govt's ethanol push risks food security

India's ethanol-blended fuel programme, a cornerstone of its energy security strategy, has saved the country at least Rs 1.44 lakh crore in foreign exchange, according to the Economic Survey. It also replaced about 245 lakh metric tonnes of crude oil as of August 2025.

India is working toward its E20 blending target - mixing 20 per cent ethanol with petrol.

However, the survey warned that the government pricing policies that favour maize-based ethanol are driving farmers away from pulses and oilseeds, raising concerns about long-term food security and nutrition.

**MAIZE BOOM, PULSES DOWN**

Maize yields have jumped 48 per cent since FY16, while yields for soybeans, sunflower, rapeseed, peanuts and millet have stagnated or declined.

The government sets annual ethanol prices by feedstock type, with assured purchases by state oil companies. Between FY22 and FY25, maize-based ethanol prices rose at 11.7 per cent annually -- faster than rice or molasses-based ethanol.

The pricing signal worked. Maize production and cultivated area grew at 8.77 per cent and 6.68 per cent annually. But pulses saw output decline.

In Maharashtra and Karnataka, maize now competes directly with pulses, oilseeds, soybean, millets and cotton for land and resources.

This deepens India's dependence on edible oil imports.

Meanwhile, the survey also called for a "modest increase" in the retail price of urea -- unchanged since March 2018 at Rs 242 per 45-kg bag.

The Survey flagged that the nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium ratio used by farmers has deteriorated sharply from 4:3.2:1 in 2009-10 to 10.9:4.1:1 in 2023-24, driven by excessive nitrogen application via subsidised urea. Agronomic benchmarks suggest a ratio closer to 4:2:1 for most crops and soil types. Excess nitrogen weakens soil. *—PTI*

LABOUR

# 40% gig workers earn below Rs 15,000/month

Stating that about 40 per cent of gig workers in India earn below Rs 15,000 per month, the Economic Survey 2025-26 called for significant policy interventions in the gig economy. It suggested the setting of "minimum per-hour or per-task earnings", which includes compensation for waiting time, to ensure fair wages and reduce the cost disparity between regular and gig employment.

The Survey said the aim of the gig-economy policy should be to reshape terms, allowing workers to exercise genuine choice instead of being forced into gigs by weak demand, skill mismatches, or the lack of a safety net.

The Economic Survey also stated that the effective implementation of Labour Codes would play a key role in supporting formal employment and improving security for women. The document noted that four codes which were notified on 21 November 2025, and rules are expected to be in place in the next few months.

The draft rules under the four codes -- Code on Wages, 2019, Industrial Relations Code, 2020, Code on Social Security, 2020, and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 -- were pre-published on 31 December 2025, for stakeholder comments. It suggested that as definitions of work continue to evolve, dynamic labour policy and flexible regulatory frameworks would ensure employment expansion, worker security and well-being.

India has recorded significant employment growth in recent years, supported by structural reforms, tax rationalisation, and a sustained focus on skill development, the survey noted. The employment and skilling ecosystem is being reshaped by demographic shifts, technological change, and evolving industry needs, including the expansion of gig and platform work, it pointed out. *—PTI*

- The Survey said the aim of the gig-economy policy should be to reshape terms, allowing workers to exercise genuine choice instead of being forced into gigs by weak demand and skill mismatches.

TRADE

# New FTAs supports India's trade plan

The expanding network of free trade agreements (FTAs) finalised by India over the years is supporting the country's trade strategy by providing reliable market access amid global uncertainties, the survey said.

The country has concluded FTAs with various countries, including the UK, Oman, New Zealand, the European Union (EU), Australia and the UAE. These pacts enable export-focused firms to boost production and become more integrated into the global value chain, it added.

It added that enhancements in export competitiveness increasingly depend on state-level implementation, as states play a vital role in providing infrastructure and regulatory certainty that export-focused firms need.

US trade deal likely to conclude this year

Ongoing negotiations for a trade agreement with the US are expected to conclude this year, a development that could help reduce uncertainty on the external front, the survey said.

Slower growth in key trading partners, tariff-induced disruptions to trade and volatility in capital flows could intermittently weigh on exports and investor sentiment, it said.

India and the US are negotiating a bilateral trade agreement since March last year. Talks are going slow as the Trump-administration has imposed a steep 50 per cent tariffs on Indian goods from August last year. *—PTI*

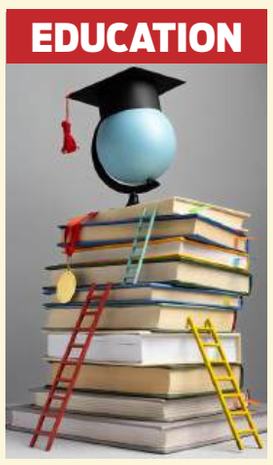
## Ramayana, Tully, and Rig Veda find place in Eco Survey

India's 739-page Economic Survey draws on an eclectic range of references, from the Rig Veda to the Ramayana, and from Mark Tully to Vladimir Lenin.

Quoting Rig Veda, Mandala 10, Sukta 191, Verse 2, it exhorts, "Move together, speak together, and let your minds be aligned." The Ramayana is cited as a metaphor for strategic learning in complex environments. Veteran journalist Mark Tully is quoted urging a shift from a "Ruler's Raj" to a "Citizen's Raj," while former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair's caution on revisiting India's RTI law highlights the need for confidential government deliberations.

Lenin's line, "There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen," is invoked to capture the pace of current global events. *—PTI*

EDUCATION



## Open schooling key to stop school dropouts

There is a need to retain school students beyond Class 8 as the secondary age-specific net enrolment remains low, the Economic Survey 2025-26 said.

While India has improved enrolment at early levels, the secondary age-specific net enrolment rate (NER) remains low at 52.2 per cent highlighting the need to retain students beyond Class 8. "A key issue is the uneven distribution of schools as 54 per cent of schools offer only foundational-preparatory education, while just 17.1 per cent provide secondary education in rural areas," it noted.

Urban areas have a higher share of secondary schools (38.1 per cent). This disparity, the document highlighted, limits rural students' access to higher-level classes, resulting in "transition losses, increased travel time, and higher dropout rates". "These structural imbalances are reflected in enrolment patterns, with a drop from the foundational and preparatory levels to the middle and to secondary levels in rural areas," the survey pointed out. The survey also said that India has made notable gains in school enrolment by strengthening infrastructure and teacher capacity, with schemes like Poshan Shakti Nirman and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan promoting access and equity. *—PTI*

RARE MINERALS & AI

# CRITICAL MINERALS 'CHOKEPOINTS' IN GLOBAL ENERGY TRANSITION

The global energy transition is no longer driven just by technology but increasingly limited by control over critical minerals, with metals like copper and rare earth elements emerging as "strategic chokepoints" that shape low-carbon economies, energy security and geopolitical influence amid export curbs by key supplier nations, the Economic Survey said on Thursday.

Copper prices have turned highly volatile due to mine disruptions in Indonesia, Congo and Chile, fuelling fears of medium- to long-term supply shortfalls against surging demand from power grids and data centres worldwide, compounded by protectionist trade barriers, the Economic Survey 2025-26 said.

"Metals like lithium, cobalt, nickel, copper, and rare earth elements have become the new strategic chokepoints in shaping the contours of a low-carbon economy, influencing energy security, industrial competitiveness, and geopolitical power, as observed through several trade restrictions on export of critical minerals by source countries," it said.

**India and AI**

India's relatively late entry into AI offers an "underappreciated advantage", allowing it to avoid energy-intensive and financially-risky models adopted by other early mover nations, and instead pursue more resource-efficient and inclusive AI path aligned with the country's public objectives, the Economic Survey said.

India is aiming to position itself as a global hub for data centres, including facilities designed to support artificial intelligence, but the Survey has warned that rapid and unchecked expansion could place heavy pressure on electricity grids and water resources. *—PTI*

ANXIETY ON THE RISE

# *Survey calls for tackling digital addiction*

Taking cognisance of the rise in digital addiction, the Economic Survey called for comprehensive interventions to address the problem, which is adversely impacting academic performance, workplace productivity, and mental health.

The survey identified digital addiction as a rising problem impacting mental health of youth and adults, and discussed measures taken by various countries.

"With near-universal mobile/internet use among 15-29-year-olds, access is no longer the binding constraint; the focus needs to shift to behavioural health considerations such as the rising problems of digital addiction," it said.

Several countries such as Australia, China, South Korea, Brazil, France, Spain, Finland, Japan, and some states in the US, have taken measures to check digital addiction.

"A major challenge in addressing digital addiction in India is the lack of comprehensive national data on its prevalence and mental health effects. This hinders targeted intervention, resource allocation, and integration of digital wellness into national mental health strategies," it said.

It said the upcoming Second National Mental Health Survey (NMHS), led by NIMHANS, is expected to give insights.

While digital access fuels learning, jobs, and civic participation, compulsive and high-intensity use can impose economic and social costs, ranging from lost study hours, reduced productivity to healthcare burdens and financial losses due to risky online behaviours.

It said compulsive scrolling and social comparison are linked to anxiety and depressive symptoms. *—PTI*

# 'Ban ads of ultra-processed foods from 6am-11pm'

Raising alarm over the rapid rise in consumption of ultra-processed foods (UPFs), the Economic Survey has called for a ban on their advertisements from morning to late night.

It warned that India has become one of the fastest-growing markets for such products globally.

The Survey flagged growing obesity, particularly among children, noting that the share of children under five who are overweight rose from 2.1 per cent in 2015–16 to 3.4 per cent in 2019–21. It estimated that over 3.3 crore children in India were obese in 2020, a number projected to climb to 8.3 crore by 2035.

Citing the National Family Health Survey 2019–21, the document said 24 per cent of women and 23 per cent of men in India are overweight or obese. To tackle the issue, the Survey proposed front-of-pack nutrition labelling with warnings for foods high in fat, sugar and salt, restrictions on marketing to children. *—PTI*

# US Fed keeps interest rates unchanged at 3.5-3.75%

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

The US Federal Reserve has kept its key benchmark interest rates unchanged, staying between 3.5 per cent– 3.75 per cent following its 27–28 January policy meeting, citing low job gains, signs of labour market stabilisation and inflation that remains somewhat elevated.

In its 28 January statement, the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) said, "In support of its goals, the Committee decided to maintain the target range for the federal funds rate at 3-1/2 to 3-3/4 per cent."

The decision was widely expected. The FOMC voted 10–2 to hold rates steady, with Governors Christopher Waller and Adriana Miran dissenting in favour of a 25-basis-point cut.

Addressing reporters, Fed Chair Jerome Powell struck a modestly hawkish tone, particularly on growth. He said the US economy is entering 2026 "on a firm footing" and that "the outlook has clearly improved since the last meeting".

Powell pointed to stabilising labour conditions and said monetary policy is "well positioned" at current levels. He stressed that decisions would be taken "meeting by meeting" and remain data-dependent. The Fed reiterated its dual mandate, noting inflation remains elevated and job gains low. It said policy moves will depend on data and risks, stands ready to act, and will meet on 17–18 March. *—ANI*

## Bruce Springsteen slams Trump, ICE in new song

**LOS ANGELES, 29 JAN**

Bruce Springsteen has released a new song dedicated to the people of Minneapolis, criticising President Donald Trump's immigration enforcement. The lyrics describe the city as "aflame fought fire and ice 'neath an occupier's boots," which Springsteen calls "King Trump's private army." He wrote and recorded it over the weekend, responding to a second deadly shooting by Federal ICE agents. The song is dedicated to Minneapolis residents, immigrant residents, and victims Alex Pretti and Renee Good. The slow-burning track builds from acoustic guitar and voice to a fuller sound, ending with "ICE Out!" A benefit concert will be held in Minneapolis on Friday, featuring artists like Tom Morello and Rise Against. *—PTI*

## Plane crashes in Colombia, all 15 onboard dead

**BOGOTA, 29 JAN**

A small plane crashed in northeast Colombia's Norte de Santander, killing all 15 people onboard, authorities said. Satena, the operator, said local officials in Curasica notified them of the crash, and rescue teams were deployed to help survivors. The Transportation Ministry confirmed there were no survivors. The aircraft, registration HK4709, departed Cucuta at 11.42am for Ocana, a mountainous region. Its final contact was shortly after takeoff. The plane carried two crew members and 13 passengers, including Diogenes Quintero, a victim of the regional conflict. The flight's typical duration is around 40 minutes. This tragedy marks a devastating loss, with authorities mourning the incident and investigating to find the cause. *—PTI*

## Venezuela will submit monthly budgets to US

**WASHINGTON, 28 JAN**

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said that the US will approve monthly budgets submitted by Venezuela. Oil proceeds from the Venzuela will be deposited in a US Treasury-controlled account, he said on Wednesday as he defended President Donald Trump. Rubio also said that the US was not seeking any further military operations in Venezuela. Nor that the US was not looking to attack Iran. On Greenland, Rubio said that "NATO needs to be reimagined". On whether the US' actions would embolden China to act against Taiwan. Meanwhile, Venezuela's military and police have pledged loyalty to interim President Delcy Rodriguez, consolidating her power. *—Agencies*

## Russian drone attack kills 3 in Ukraine

**KYIV, 29 JAN**

A Russian drone attack killed three people in Ukraine's southern Zaporizhzhia, authorities said Thursday. The strike caused a major blaze in an apartment building, according to emergency services. Further, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned that Moscow is planning another barrage despite plans for further US-brokered peace talks at the weekend. Zelenskyy said Ukrainian intelligence warns Russia is preparing a major aerial attack, following previous strikes on the power grid. The ongoing attacks discredit the peace talks, Zelenskyy said. "Every single Russian strike does," he said late Wednesday. Negotiations between the two sides are poised to resume on Sunday amid doubts about Moscow's commitment to a settlement. *—PTI*

# Xi, Starmer agree to renew ties

## UK seeks to sell Scotch to China, cooperate on border security

**WASHINGTON, 29 JAN**

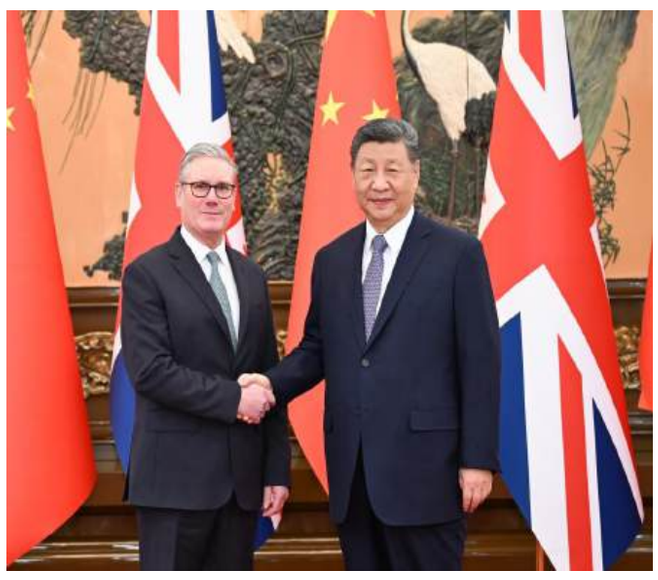
The leaders of Britain and China called Thursday for a "comprehensive strategic partnership" to deepen ties between their nations.

This comes at a time of growing global turbulence an uncertainty. Neither Prime Minister Keir Starmer nor President Xi Jinping publicly mentioned Donald Trump, but the US President's challenge to the post-Cold War order was clearly on their minds.

"I think that working together on issues like climate change, global stability during challenging times for the world is precisely what we should be doing," Starmer told Xi at the start of their meeting in Beijing.

The two met for 80 minutes — double the scheduled time — in the Great Hall of the People as their nations try to improve relations after several years of acrimony.

Relations have deteriorated over allegations of Chinese spying in Britain, China's support for Russia in the Ukraine war and the crackdown on freedoms in Hong Kong, the former British colony that was returned to China in 1997.



British Prime Minister Keir Starmer shakes hands with Chinese President Xi Jinping ahead of a meeting in Beijing Thursday *—PTI*

Starmer is the first British Prime Minister to visit in eight years.

"In the current turbulent and ever-changing international situation ... China and the UK need to strengthen dialogue and cooperation to maintain world peace and stability," Xi said.

After the meeting, Starmer said the leaders had made "really good progress" on issues including slashing Chinese tariffs on Scotch whisky and introducing visa-free travel for British visitors. Starmer was accompanied by a delegation of nearly 60 of Britain's biggest businesses and cultural organisations.

Both sides are set for the first joint UK-China law enforcement action before Chinese boats and engines can reach criminal networks in Europe.

Inflatable dinghies used in small boat crossings across the English Channel, often made using parts sourced in China, have been enabling gangs to pack ever larger numbers onto single vessels, with recent crossings carrying over 100 people in increasingly life-threatening conditions, 10 Downing Street said in a statement. *—PTI*

**BANGLADESH POLLS**

# Exclusionary govt can't unite: Hasina

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

From her exile in India, Bangladesh's ousted leader Sheikh Hasina has slammed the country's upcoming election after her party was barred from the polls.

Hasina, sentenced to death over her 2024 crackdown, warned Bangladesh risks prolonged instability without inclusive, free and fair elections.

She said the Yunus-led interim government disenfranchised millions by excluding the Awami League from the election.

"Each time political participation is denied to a significant portion of the population, it deepens resentment, delegitimises institutions and creates the conditions for future instability," she wrote. "A government born of exclusion cannot unite a divided nation."

At least 127 million people in Bangladesh are eligible to vote in one of the most significant elections for the country on 12 February.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by former prime minister Khaleda Zia's son, Tarique Rahman, 60, has emerged as the leading contender in the polls. The BNP had boycotted elections briefly during Hasina's tenure, and when it did participate, it claimed that the leader had rigged the polls.

Rahman's main rival is an Islamist-led coalition headed by Jamaat-e-Islami, once banned under Hasina, who said the boycott may have been a lapse. Yunus said the elections will be free and fair, with about 500 foreign observers, set to monitor the polls. *—PTI*

## China executes 11 in Myanmar based scam crackdown

**BANGKOK, 29 JAN**

China has executed 11 members of a Myanmar-based family crime syndicate that killed 14 Chinese citizens and ran scam and gambling operations worth more than USD 1 billion, authorities said.

The Wenzhou city Intermediate People's Court announced the execution in a statement Thursday morning. It sentenced the 11 people to death in September. They included Ming Guoping and Ming Zhenzhen, who the court found led the scam and gambling operations, as well as key group members Zhou Weichang, Wu Hongming and Luao Jianzhang.

The group filed an appeal tThe appeal was rejected in November, and family members were detained in November 2023 after China pressured border authorities to crack down on scams.

Scam parks have grown into an industrial-scale business in Southeast Asia, especially in Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos, using trafficked and willing labour to target victims worldwide.

Authorities face growing international pressure from China, the US to address the proliferation of criminal activity. *—PTI*

# ICE told not to engage with Minnesota protesters

**MINNESOTA/ WASHINGTON, 29 JAN**

ICE officers in Minnesota were directed on Wednesday to avoid engaging with "agitators" as they carry out President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown, according to internal guidance reviewed by Reuters

The new guidance, offering the most detailed look yet at how operations would change after the fatal shootings of US citizens Renée Nicole Macklin Good, 37, and Alex Peretti by ICE agents during protests in Minneapolis, also orders ICE officers to target only immigrants with criminal charges or convictions.

Marking a departure from the broad sweeps that have provoked backlash and legal challenges in Minneapolis and other US cities.

Two Border Patrol agents who fatally shot Alex Pretti were placed on administrative leave, even as Trump sought to quell backlash and immigration raids continued, and videos emerged showing Pretti in an earlier confrontation with federal agents 11 days before he was killed.

The move, which the DHS emphasised is standard protocol when agents are involved in fatal shootings, comes as the president suggested he would "de-escalate" his immigration enforcement crackdown in the state, but without offering details or whether tactics would change.

A third round of No Kings protests is being planned for 28 March – galvanized by the back-to-back killings in the immigration operation in Minnesota. Expected by some to draw as many as 9 million people, making it the largest protest in US history. *—Agencies*

## US WARNS AGAINST TRAVEL TO PAKISTAN

**WASHINGTON DC, 29 JAN**

The United States has urged its citizens to reconsider travel to Pakistan, citing security risks including crime, civil unrest, terrorism and kidnapping, according to Dawn.

In an updated advisory issued on January 26, the State Department placed Pakistan under "Level 3: Reconsider Travel", warning that terrorist attacks may occur without notice and often target transport hubs, hotels, markets, airports, schools, hospitals, places of worship and government buildings.

Parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are classified as "Level 4: Do Not Travel areas", where assassination and kidnapping attempts are common. The advisory applies to all US citizens worldwide globally. *—ANI*

## NEWBORNS IN US GET $1,000 INVESTMENT IN 'TRUMP ACCOUNT'

**WASHINGTON, 29 JAN**

US President Donald Trump launched the 'Trump Account' initiative, which he said would give every "newborn American child a financial stake in the future" at an event in Washington on Wednesday.

"We'll fund those personal accounts with a seed contribution of $1,000 which will compound and grow over the course of their lives," Trump said. He added that parents and guardians can then add up to $5,000 annually to a child's account.

The $1,000 seed will be given to each baby born between 1 January, 2025 and 28 December, 2028, falling within Trump's second term. Once the child turns 18, they can begin using the money.

With modest contributions, Trump said the accounts could reach at least $50,000 by the time a child turns 18, and potentially far more. "The typical account will grow to $1,00,000, $2,00,000, and can even grow up to past $300,000 per child".

These funds can be used only for "qualified expenses", such as education, buying a home or starting a business. The bill for the account was signed on 4 July last year. *—Agencies*

**NICKI GETS GOLD VISA**

Rapper Nicki Minaj is under fire from fans after endorsing Donald Trump and showcasing a "gold card." The move prompted a wave of unverified claims regarding her legal status in the US. The Trinidad and Tobago-born rapper declared herself Trump's "number one fan" *—PTI*

Syrian interim-President Ahmed al-Sharaa met Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday *—TASS*

## SYRIAN INTERIM PREZ MEETS PUTIN OVER MILITARY TIES

**MOSCOW, 29 JAN**

Syrian interim-President Ahmed al-Sharaa met Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday and spoke on redefining Moscow's military role in Syria. This was al-Sharaa's second visit to Moscow in four months, following Russian forces began pulling out of positions in northeast Syria as government forces clashed with Kurdish fighters.

Russia backed Bashar al-Assad until his 2024 ouster, maintained a major military presence in Syria, and later granted him asylum. However, on Wednesday, Putin told al-Sharaa: "I want to congratulate you on the fact that the process of restoring the territorial integrity of Syria is gaining momentum."

For the Kremlin, it's essential to have its bases on Syria's coast, the only outposts outside the former Soviet Union.

The Kremlin also said that it doesn't refer to al-Sharaa as an interim President, but just President, Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Meanwhile, Syria has granted citizenship to Kurdish minorities, explicitly listening to those who are stateless. *—Agencies*

# EU to sanction Iran's Revolutionary Guard

**BRUSSELS, 29 JAN**

EU set to sanction Iran's Revolutionary Guard amid protest crackdown.

EU diplomat Kaja Kallas said sanctions will likely proceed, equating the group with al-Qaida, Hamas, and Daesh.

The long-anticipated move by Europe will put new pressure on Iran, whose economy already struggles under international sanctions. Its rial fell to a record low of 1.6 million to USD 1 on Thursday. Iran has been criticising Europe in recent days as it considered the move, which follows the US sanctioning the Guard.

EU sanctions require unanimous approval, which has sometimes limited action against Russia. France initially opposed listing Iran's Guard as terrorists over citizen safety, but Macron's office signaled support Wednesday.

The US deployed the USS Abraham Lincoln and destroyers to the Mideast, while Iran threatened strikes on US bases and Israel. Trump's potential use of force remains unclear amid protests that have killed over 6,300 people. *—PTI*

Trump's potential use of force remains unclear amid protests that have killed over 6,300 people. *—PTI*

**INDIAN ORIGIN**

# *Don's cyber chief leaks data to ChatGPT*

**WASHINGTON, 29 JAN**

The interim head of the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), an Indian-origin official, uploaded sensitive documents to a public version of ChatGPT last summer, triggering automated alerts, Politico reported, citing Homeland Security officials.

Although none of the documents were classified, officials said the material included contracting files marked "for official use only", a designation applied to sensitive government information,

The report said acting CISA director Madhu Gottumukkala had received special approval from the agency's chief information office to use ChatGPT shortly after joining CISA in May, when access to the tool was still restricted for most DHS employees.

Cybersecurity monitoring systems later detected the uploads in August, with multiple alerts recorded during the first week alone. Following the detection, senior DHS leadership initiated an internal review to assess whether the disclosures had compromised government security, though the outcome of that review remains unclear.

CISA said Gottumukkala had approved, limited access to ChatGPT under DHS controls, adding the agency remains focused on AI-driven government modernisation under Trump's executive order.

McCarthy further stated, "Acting Director Dr Madhu Gottumukkala last used ChatGPT in mid-July 2025 under an authorised exception employees. CISA blocks ChatGPT by default unless an exception is granted. *—ANI*

## CENTRE NOTIFIES SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT RULES

India is introducing mandatory four-stream waste segregation to improve recycling, reduce landfill burden, and promote decentralised waste management. The rules will kick-in from 1 April

**4 waste categories**

- **Wet waste:** Food scraps, kitchen waste
- **Dry waste:** Paper, plastic, metal, glass, recyclable packaging
- **Sanitary waste:** Diapers, sanitary napkins, tampons
- **Special care waste:** Chemicals and e-waste

**Who are "bulk waste generators"**

Government departments, PSUs, institutions, commercial establishments, residential societies meeting any one of the following criteria

- Built-up area of 20,000 sq. m or more
- Water usage of 40,000 litres/day or more
- Solid waste generation of 100 kg/day or more

If the segregation is not followed, then polluters will pay penalties based on municipal laws

# Rupee hits record intra-day low of 92

## Outflows make it Asia's worst-performing

**MUMBAI, 29 JAN**

The rupee settled near its all-time closing low at 91.96 (provisional) against the US dollar, amid selling pressure from foreign funds and risk-off sentiment in global markets.

Forex traders said the rupee hit its all-time intra-day low of 92 against the US dollar amid geopolitical uncertainty and foreign outflows. Moreover, a surge in crude oil prices weighed on the rupee.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 91.95 and touched an early high of 91.82, but pared gains to touch an intra-day low of 92 against the greenback.

The domestic unit settled at 91.96 (provisional), up 3 paise from its previous close.

On Wednesday, the rupee settled 31 paise down, revisiting its lowest-ever closing level of 91.99 against the greenback.

On January 23, the rupee hit an all-time intra-day low of 92 against the US dollar.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.07 per cent lower at 96.37.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading 1.83 per cent lower at USD 69.64 per barrel in futures trade.

"Persistent dollar strength, elevated US bond yields, and continued foreign portfolio outflows have collectively kept emerging market currencies under stress, with the rupee being no exception," Akshat Garg, Head, Research & Product of Choice Wealth, said. *—PTI*

## SILVER PRICES BREACH RS 4 LAKH PER KG MARK

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

Silver prices surged past the Rs 4 lakh per kilogram mark in futures trade on Thursday, while gold hit a lifetime high, buoyed by strong global cues and safe-haven buying. On the Multi Commodity Exchange, March silver futures jumped 5.73 per cent to a record Rs 4,07,456 per kg. Gold futures for February delivery climbed 8.8 per cent to an all-time high of Rs 1,80,501 per 10 grams.

In overseas markets, gold futures on Comex crossed USD 5,600 per ounce for the first time, while silver touched a record USD 119.51 per ounce. Analysts cited strong industrial demand for silver, a weaker US dollar, and heightened geopolitical and economic uncertainty as drivers of the rally.

However, record prices have weighed on physical demand in India. According to the World Gold Council, India's gold demand fell 11 per cent in 2025 to 710.9 tonnes and is expected to be 600–700 tonnes in 2026. Jewellery demand dropped 24 per cent to 430.5 tonnes. *—PTI*

**TATA STEEL GAINS TOO**

# Markets advance for 3rd day, L&T major driver

**MUMBAI, 29 JAN**

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed higher on Thursday, helped by a rally in blue-chip Larsen & Toubro and the Economic Survey projecting the GDP growth of 6.8-7.2 per cent for the next fiscal.

Erasing its early losses, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 221.69 points or 0.27 per cent to settle at 82,566.37. During the morning trade, it tanked 636.74 points or 0.77 per cent to 81,707.94.

The 50-share NSE Nifty edged higher by 76.15 points or 0.30 per cent to end at 25,418.90. The broader index fell 182.95 points or 0.72 per cent to a low of 25,159.80 in early trade.

A rally in global markets and fresh foreign fund inflows helped key indices recover from lows, analysts said.

From the 30 Sensex firms, Tata Steel jumped the most by 4.41 per cent.

Larsen & Toubro climbed 3.66 per cent after its consolidated revenue from operations in the October-December quarter rose by 10 per cent to Rs 71,450 crore from Rs 64,668 crore in the year-ago period.

Axis Bank, Eternal, NTPC, Adani Ports and ICICI Bank were also among the gainers.

However, Asian Paints, InterGlobe Aviation, Maruti and Bharat Electronics were among the laggards.

Foreign institutional investors turned buyers on Wednesday after days of offloading stocks, according to exchange data. They bought stocks worth Rs 480.26 crore. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) also bought equities worth Rs 3,360.59 crore. *—PTI*

## Musk says Tesla ending Models S and X production

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

Tesla CEO Elon Musk has said that the electric vehicle (EV) maker is ending production of Model S and Model X, asking people to place orders before stocks run out, CNBC reported. Tesla will repurpose its Fremont factory in California, United States, to build the company's humanoid robots, Optimus. Priced at around $95,000 and $1,00,000 for the base variants, Model Sand X are among Tesla's oldest vehicles, along with the original Roadster. According to Reuters, Tesla saw its first annual decline in revenue, plunging 3 per cent to nearly $94.83 billion in 2025. Adjusted earnings per share of 50 cents in the fourth quarter topped Wall Street targets of 45 cents, according to LSEG data. Net income fell 61% to $840 million in the quarter.*—Agencies*

# Microsoft's Q3 earnings rise 17% to $81.3B

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

Microsoft Corp. has announced its financial results for the quarter ended 31 December, 2025, reporting a 17 per cent increase revenue to USD 81.3 billion.

Satya Nadella, chairman and CEO of Microsoft, stated on X that the company is still in the beginning phases of AI diffusion and its broad impact on gross domestic product. Microsoft has already built an AI business larger than some of its biggest franchises. Its quarterly cloud revenue surpassed the USD 50 billion mark for the first time.

The company saw its operating income rise by 21 per cent to USD 38.3 billion, while net income on a generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) basis reached USD 38.5 billion. Diluted earnings per share on a GAAP basis stood at USD 5.16.

The annual cloud revenue was USD 10 billion less than 10 years ago.

Microsoft achieved a 50 per cent increase in throughput for OpenAI inferencing, which powers its Copilot.

The company is also focusing on developing its new first-party systems, such as Maia 200, and its agent platform. More than 1,500 customers have used both Anthropic and OpenAI models on Foundry. *—PTI*

**AMID RISING DEMAND**

# Air India to order 30 Boeing 737 Max jets

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

Air India Ltd will order for an additional 30 Boeing Co. 737 Max aircraft as part of a fleet expansion plan as air travel demand surges in India.

The order follows Air India's 1 commitment of 470 aircraft from Boeing Co. and Airbus SE.

Of these, 220 were from Boeing, including 190 Max jets deployed by Air India Express. This marks Air India's second major confirmation of options after finalizing 100 Airbus aircraft in 2024.

Since taking over the airline in 2022, the Tata Group invested heavily in refurbishing older planes and expanding its fleet. Air India, the country's second largest domest carrier, owns 191 aircraft.

Boeing projects India and South Asia to need 3,290 new aircraft by 2044. The country's fleet has grown from about 100 aircraft in 2000 to nearly 900 today, with more than 1,500 planes on order.

The growth comes despite a turbulent 2025, marked by India's worst aviation disaster, the crash of a Boeing 787 Dreamliner in Ahmedabad, with a report of the crash still awaited. Operational disruptions at IndiGo also marred the aviation sector. *—Agencies*

## 'INDIA'S AIRCRAFT FLEET TO REACH 2,250 BY 2035'

**HYDERABAD, 29 JAN**

India's commercial aircraft fleet of over 100 seats will triple to 2,250 over the next decade from the existing 850, a senior official of the aircraft maker Airbus said.

Jürgen Westermeier, president and managing director, Airbus India and South Asia, said the first Indian originally made and assembled Airbus C-295, a twin-engine medium military transport aircraft, will be delivered in 2026.

Airbus currently has a backlog of 1,250 aircraft from Indian carriers and hopes to deliver on an average 120-150 planes every year.

The fleet expansion is driven both by the Indian aviation market boom and the Indian airlines' ambition to expand on international routes.

Indian carriers have placed orders for over 1,700 aircraft, 72 per cent of which is Airbus, Westermeier said.

India is expected to have 50 more airports in the next 10 years.

While the requirement of pilots and technical workforce will surge to 35,000 and 34,000 respectively. *—PTI*

# Airtel, Adobe offer free Express Premium access to 360M users

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

Bharti Airtel on Thursday said it will provide free access to Adobe Express Premium to 360 million customers, to create high-quality social assets, marketing materials, short videos, and design other content.

The move comes as such AI-powered design tools are rapidly gaining traction, prompting Indian telecom operators to strike partnerships with global tech firms to keep user engagement high within their digital ecosystems.

In a release, Airtel said that, with the Adobe Express Premium, valued at about Rs 4,000, free for a year, its customers can express their creativity and produce professional-quality content, regardless of their design experience.

The Adobe Express Premium subscription will be available to all customers of Airtel, including mobile, WiFi, and DTH customers, the release said. *—PTI*

# Adani Power Q3 net profit falls over 15% to Rs 2,488 cr

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

Adani Power on Thursday reported a more than 15 per cent year-on-year decline in consolidated net profit to Rs 2,488 crore for the December quarter of FY26, primarily due to lower one-time income.

Total revenue in Q3 FY26 stood at Rs 12,717 crore, compared with Rs 13,434 crore in the corresponding quarter last year, reflecting lower tariffs and reduced other income. Consolidated power sale volume rose marginally to 23.6 billion units during the quarter, from 23.3 billion units a year ago, despite demand disruptions caused by an early and prolonged monsoon.

The company secured a new power purchase agreement of 3,200 MW from the Assam power distribution company.

As of 31 December, 2025, Adani Power's total outstanding debt increased to Rs 45,330.79 crore from Rs 38,334.88 crore as of 31 March, 2025. Net debt rose to Rs 38,679.28 crore from Rs 31,023.43 crore, largely due to bridge financing for capital expenditure. Shares of Adani Power opened at Rs 135.35 on the BSE, touched a high of Rs 136.50 and a low of Rs 132.60, before settling at Rs 133.89

On 23 January, Adani group firms lost about 12.5 billion dollars in market capitalisation after the US Securities and Exchange Commission sought court permission to email summonses to founder Gautam Adani and executive Sagar Adani over a fraud and a bribery scheme. *—PTI*

## ECO SURVEY'S GROWTH FORECAST REALISTIC: INDIA INC

**NEW DELHI, 29 JAN**

The Economic Survey sets out a clear medium-term reform and growth agenda aligned with Viksit Bharat, and the projection of 6.8 -7.2 per cent economic growth for next fiscal appears realistic, India Inc said.

The forecast for 2026-27 is slower than the 7.4 per cent projection for the current financial year that is driven by consumption and investment.

Chandrajit Banerjee, director general, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) said the survey offers a pragmatic, professional, and well-articulated assessment of India's macroeconomic conditions at a critical juncture.

Saurabh Sanyal, secretary general, ASSOCHAM said while macroeconomic stability and public investment have provided a strong foundation, unlocking India's upgraded growth potential will require continued momentum on process reforms and deregulation that lower the cost of doing business and improve ease of enterprise.

Shrivallabh Goyal, CEO , Reliance MET City (Model Economic Township Ltd) stated that the Economic Survey rightly reframes cities as economic infrastructure. We have to integrate manufacturing, skills and urban living in a single ecosystem. *—PTI*

**NOBEL LAUREATE SPEAKS**

# *'FTA key signal to US; gains hinge on efficiency'*

**KOLKATA, 29 JAN**

Nobel laureate economist Abhijit Banerjee described the India-EU free trade agreement (FTA) as "a strategic alignment," and a message to Washington that "we don't need the US as much as America thinks we do," amid high tariffs imposed by Donald Trump's administration. He cautioned that the deal, called the "mother of all deals," would not automatically bring broad gains unless India improves efficiency and logistics significantly.

Banerjee noted that trade deals are merely initial steps, emphasising that "trade agreements are just a starting point," and success depends on product competitiveness and market demand. The agreement, covering nearly a quarter of global GDP, will reduce tariffs on 99 per cent of Indian exports and duties on 97 per cent of EU exports. Sectors like textiles, leather, handicrafts, footwear, and marine products in India are set to benefit, while Europe gains in wine, automobiles, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals.

He highlighted that while India is competitive in jewellery and leather, it faces stiff competition from Vietnam and Bangladesh, especially in textiles. The key constraint, he explained, is delivery speed and supply-chain efficiency, citing US retailers who say India's transport and port systems are slow. Banerjee said India must "get the efficiency to the Chinese level" to fully benefit from trade agreements.

He also addressed US tariffs, which disrupt global trade, and described India's response as "unfair, unjustified and unreasonable." Comparing markets, Banerjee said the US offers a "gigantic market," whereas Europe specialises in luxury goods and machinery. He emphasised that the realisation of trade benefits hinges on how well India improves supply chains. *—PTI*

# Zuck's Meta to double AI spending in 2026

**WASHINGTON, 29 JAN**

Meta chief executive Mark Zuckerberg has said 2026 will be the year artificial intelligence "starts to dramatically change the way that we work", as the company flattens teams and rolls out AI tools to boost individual productivity.

The comments come as Meta faces pressure to justify its aggressive AI push, with capital expenditure projected to nearly double this year to as much as 135 billion dollars.

Speaking on an investor call, Zuckerberg said Meta users would soon see new AI models and products following a major overhaul of the company's AI efforts in 2025. "In 2025, we rebuilt the foundations of our AI programme," he said, referring to the restructuring of Meta's AI lab to enable faster deployment of new technologies.

These tools will be powered by AI tailored to individual preferences.

Zuckerberg also highlighted Meta's data advantage, saying the company is beginning to see the promise of AI that understands users' personal context, including their history, interests, content and relationships. *—Agencies*

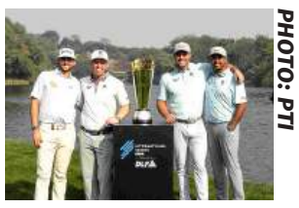


PHOTO: PTI

## Int'l Series returns to India for second edition in B'luru

BENGALURU, 29 JAN

The International Series will return to India for the second time when the LIV Golf-backed Asian Tour event is held at the Prestige Golfshire Club in Bengaluru from 8-11 October as part of its 2026 global schedule announced on Thursday. The Bengaluru leg, the fifth stop of the season, follows the tournament's successful India debut in 2025. It was in 2025 that American Bryson DeChambeau captured global attention by bringing a whole new audience out to watch golf royalty in action. The edition was a spectacular success, drawing large crowds and showcasing world-class golf on Indian soil with top LIV Golf players like Joaquín Niemann, Paul Casey, Carlos Ortiz, Abraham Ancer, Harold Varner III, local hero Anirban Lahiri, along with DeChambeau.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X/@PCB

## Ayub's all-round show helps Pak beat Australia

LAHORE, 29 JAN

Pakistan came out swinging in the series opener at Gaddafi Stadium, beating Australia by 22 runs and grabbing a 1-0 lead in the T20I series. The crowd got everything fireworks from Saim Ayub at the top, then a spinning clinic from Abrar Ahmed. Australia just couldn't figure it out on this pitch.Things didn't start perfectly for Pakistan. After they won the toss and batted first, Sahibzada Farhan was gone on the first ball. But Saim Ayub didn't blink. He smashed 40 off just 22 ballsthree cracking boundaries, two huge sixes, and suddenly the place was buzzing. Captain Salman Ali Agha chipped in with 39, and together they took Pakistan to 56 for 1.—*PTI*

## PSG held to a 1-1 draw by Newcastle

LONDON, 29 JAN

Title-holder Paris Saint-Germain and Newcastle United will both go into the Champions League play-off round after playing out a 1-1 draw in their final match of the league phase on Wednesday night. Ousmane Dembele had a fourth-minute penalty saved at the Parc des Princes, but Vitinha put PSG ahead soon after, only for Joe Willock to equalise for Newcastle in first-half stoppage time. It meant Newcastle finished with a solitary win in its last four European outings, while PSG has won none of its last three and just one of its last five a long way from the form which saw it become European champion on last season.Luis Enrique's side had to come through the knockout phase play-offs a year ago.—*PTI*

## Jammu gears up for YSS-JKSC football

JAMMU, 29 JAN

Jammu will host the YSS-JKSC Football and Cricket Premier Leagues in a bid to strengthen grassroots sports, with matches scheduled to begin early next month, an official said on Thursday. An initiative of the Department of Youth Services and Sports (YSS) in collaboration with the Jammu and Kashmir Sports Council (JKSC), the leagues aim to revive competitive sports and provide a platform for local talent, the official said. The tournament will be held at the Synthetic Turf Football Ground, Parade, and the M A Stadium.—*PTI*

# Aryna Sabalenka to face Elena in Melbourne final

### Alcaraz and Zverev will meet for 13th time in SF today

MELBOURNE, 29 JAN

Aryna Sabalenka will face Elena Rybakina in a big-hitting Australian Open final after the world number one kept her cool to storm past Elina Svitolina and reach a fourth Melbourne showpiece in a row.

Two-time winner Sabalenka on Thursday overcame fluctuations in form and a hindrance call against her in the fourth game of the match to thrash Svitolina 6-2, 6-3.

Sabalenka, bidding for a fifth Grand Slam singles title, is on an 11-match winning streak and has hit the most winners of any player during this year's tournament (172).

Strong-serving Rybakina has lost just one of her past 20 matches - and it is the Kazakh world number five who edges their head-to-head on hard courts 6-5. Sabalenka will also be searching for some redemption after last year's final, when she felt she was "not brave enough" in a three-set loss to Madison Keys.

Ukraine's 12th seed Svitolina had beaten two top-10 players to reach the semi-finals but was no match for Sabalenka's powerful hitting on Thursday.

Sabalenka's stats - 29 winners to 15 unforced errors and dropping just 11 points on serve - show how she dominated the play, but more impressive was her mental focus.

An engaging, occasionally volatile figure on court, Sabalenka let her emotions get the better of her in both the Australian Open and French Open finals last year.

Carlos Alcaraz and Alexander Zverev will meet for the 13th time in their tennis careers when they face off in the Australian Open semi-final on Friday.

Aryna Sabalenka and Elena Rybakina -AO

Top seed Alcaraz is looking to break new ground by reaching the final of this tournament as he closes in on a career Grand Slam. He has achieved a tournament best in Melbourne, reaching the last four for the first time, but will need to be at his best to get past Friday's opponent. Zverev is in the semi-final for a third consecutive year. In 2025, he advanced to the final, where he was beaten by Jannik Sinner.

Aiming for his first Grand Slam title, all but one of Zverev's matches have ended in four sets during this tournament. With a place in the final on the line, here is what you need to know ahead of Alcaraz vs Zverev. Jannik Sinner will take on Novak Djokovic in another Grand Slam semifinal after a straight-sets win against Ben Shelton at the Australian Open. Sinner's problems of the third round, when he was in trouble in the heat against Eliot Spizzirri, now seem a distant memory, with the two-time defending champion brushing aside big-serving Shelton 6-3, 6-4, 6-4. —*PTI*

WOMEN'S PL PLAYOFF SPOT

# Gujarat Giants, MI face off in must-win WPL clash

VADODARA, 29 JAN

Defending champions and two-time winners Mumbai Indians will take on Gujarat Giants in a crucial Friday encounter, with the Giants aiming to secure a second consecutive Women's Premier League playoff spot.

Gujarat Giants are currently second on the points table with eight points and a negative Net Run Rate (NRR) of -0.271. They sit two points ahead of the Mumbai Indians (six points, NRR +0.146) and the Delhi Capitals (six points, NRR -0.164).

The Giants hold their fate in their own hands, with a win over Harmanpreet Kaur's Mumbai Indians securing their spot in the WPL playoffs, while a victory by a record margin could propel them straight into the final.

However, even a narrow defeat could end the Giants' campaign, especially if UP Warriorz defeat Royal Challengers Bengaluru later on Thursday.

Gujarat Giants would still have a slim chance of making the playoffs even if they lose to Mumbai Indians on Friday, but only if UP Warriorz first defeat Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Thursday and then overcome Delhi Capitals.

Gujarat Giants have lost all eight of their previous encounters against Mumbai Indians, making skipper Ashleigh Gardner's task even tougher given Harmanpreet's side's pedigree and their proven ability to excel in high-pressure situations.

The Giants, though, have the momentum with them, especially after the legendary Sophie Devine bowled them to a thrilling three-run win against the Delhi Capitals in their last outing.

MI will be riding high after dominating one of the tournament's top teams, RCB, for most of their last match, ultimately winning by 15 runs.

Despite a whirlwind 90 from Richa Ghosh, MI maintained a tight grip on RCB. The match starts at 7:30 PM IST. —*PTI*

TATA STEEL MASTERS

# Gukesh wins, Erigaisi loses, and Pragg draws in Round 10

WIJK AAN ZEE, 29 JAN

India's top-rated chess player Arjun Erigaisi could not match the skills of Vincent Keymer of Germany in key moments and crashed to another defeat in the 10th round of Tata Steel Masters here.

World champion D. Gukesh fought his way back into contention, delivering an endgame masterclass against young prodigy Yagiz Kaan Erdogmus. Playing with the black pieces, Gukesh secured another clinical victory to take his tally to a respectable five points out of a possible 10.

A positional blunder in the closed Ruy Lopez is often unforgivable, and that was precisely Erigaisi's undoing. Vincent Keymer was quick to pounce, and from that point on, there was no looking back for the German, who himself has endured a mixed tournament so far.

Meanwhile, Praggnanandhaa settled for a draw with Niemann in a French Defence encounter, a game in which neither player found much scope for complications. Praggnanandhaa's surprise French Defense Rubinstein Variation may have caused some eyebrows in elite circles because the young Indian is trying different things ahead of the much-awaited Candidates tournament.—*PTI*

# Australia reveals new captain as squads announced for India

SYDNEY, 29 JAN

Spin bowling all-rounder Sophie Molineux was on Thursday appointed the Australian women's T20 captain for the series against ODI world champions India next month and will succeed Alyssa Healy as the leader across formats after the home assignment.

Healy had announced that she would retire from international cricket after playing against India, in which she will captain the Australian team in three ODIs and a one-off Test.

Australia's squads for all formats were announced on Thursday. India's tour of Australia begins on February 15 with a three-match T20I series starting in Sydney. The other two matches will be played on 19 to 21 February and in Canberra and Adelaide.

The three-match ODI series will be played on 24 to 27 February and 1 March. The first match will be held at Brisbane's Allan Border Field while the next two will be at the Bellerive Oval in Hobart. The one-off Test between India and Australia will be played at the iconic WACA Ground in Perth from 6 to 9 March. —*PTI*

## Pak T20 WC team to leave for Colombo on 2 Feb: PCB

The Pakistan Cricket Board has already scheduled its T20 World Cup squad to depart for Colombo early on February 2, virtually ruling out any possibility of boycotting either the tournament or the marquee clash against India on February 15, sources close to the board said on Thursday. "The PCB has already made travel arrangements for the World Cup squad to leave early morning on February 2 for Colombo," he said. The source added that PCB had shown its full support to the Bangladesh Cricket Board over their "security concerns" in playing in India and could not do anything further without damaging its own position within the ICC. The BCCI, PCB, and ICC had also entered into a tripartite agreement under which all India-Pakistan matches in ICC events until 2027 will be played at neutral venues. "Keep in mind Pakistan's entire World Cup schedule is in Sri Lanka, including the final if they qualify. So on what grounds can they boycott the tournament or the match against India?" he asked. It is expected that the PCB will confirm its participation on Friday.

# Nobbs, former India hockey player and coach, dies

SYDNEY, 29 JAN

Former Australian hockey player Michael Nobbs, who coached the Indian men's team at the 2012 London Olympics, has died after a prolonged illness.

He was 72 years old and is survived by his wife, Lee Capes, a former Australian women's international, and daughter Kaitlin, who is a current Hockeyroos star. "Hockey Australia extends its deepest condolences to Michael's family, friends, former teammates, players, and all those whose lives and careers were shaped by his contribution to hockey. He will be remembered as a proud Kookaburra, a respected professional, and a servant of the sport," Hockey Australia said in a statement.

Nobbs represented Australia as a defender, playing across the half-back line and at full-back, and was renowned for his reliability, fitness, and professionalism. He earned 76 international caps for Australia between 1979 and 1985. —*PTI*

# EMANJOT FRUSTRATES KARNATAKA ON OPENING DAY

BENGALURU, 29 JAN

Emanjot Singh Chahal made a gritty 77 not out in his first-class comeback to lift Punjab to a competitive 303 for nine against Karnataka on the opening day of their final league Ranji Trophy Group B fixture here on Thursday.

Having reduced Punjab to 168 for six, Karnataka were left frustrated by the Punjab lower-order, mainly Emanjot, who stood firm against a formidable opposition.

However, Emanjot seized the momentum from Karnatak, who are in the hunt for a knockout berth, while Punjab are out of contention. Primarily a left-arm spinner with a free-flowing action, the 21-year-old, who bat right handed, negated the threat from Karnataka spinners on a helping surface brilliantly.

For Karnataka, Vidhyadar Patil and leg-spinner Shreyas Gopal shared three wickets amongst themselves.

Karnataka did not have its best day on the field, and Shikhar Shetty dropping tailender Sukhdeep Bajwa (20) was an example of that.

**Jurel misses out ton**

India international Dhruv Jurel missed out on a deserving ton by just four runs as his team Uttar Pradesh was bowled out for 237, courtesy a six-wicket haul from Vidarbha left-arm spinner Harsh Dubey on day one of their final Group A Ranji Trophy league fixture here. At stumps, hosts Vidarbha (25 points), who are looking at an outright win to qualify for the knock-outs, were 33 for no loss.

**Mumbai players forced to wear face masks**

Home team Mumbai's players were on Thursday forced to put on face masks to protect themselves from pollution caused by construction on the first day of their Ranji Trophy tie against Delhi.

India and Mumbai batter Sarfaraz Khan, his younger brother Musheer Khan, and spinner Himanshu Singh were seen wearing face masks during the third session's play here at the MCA-BKC Ground. —*PTI*

RAPE-ACCUSED

# *EFI sends Tarsem EC member as coach to Jordan*

BEIJING, 29 JAN

The naming of rape-accused Col (Retd) Tarsem Singh Warraich for an overseas assignment has yet again brought the Equestrian Federation of India (EFI) under the scanner, even as the Sports Ministry, in an unrelated development, has issued a show-cause notice to the federation over prolonged governance and compliance failures.

The immediate controversy centres on EFI's decision to send Tarsem as coach-cum-manager of the Indian team for the International Tent Pegging Federation (ITPF) World Cup Qualifiers in Jordan from January 29-31.

The top two teams will qualify for the finals in November in Jordan.

Tarsem, an executive committee member of EFI, has never competed in a national tent pegging championship and was previously suspended by the federation in an impersonation-related case from 2022 to 2024.

His selection was censored by the father of a junior rider who wrote to the world governing body, ITPF. Giving details, he mentioned that an FIR has been registered against Colonel Tarsem Singh Warraich in Sonepat about a sexual harassment complaint filed by two women.

"Given the seriousness of the offence and the fact that the individual is only out on bail, how can the sports authorities allow Colonel Tarsem Singh to travel outside the country, let alone represent the Nation," he wrote.

Responding to this, ITPF has asked EFI to take "appropriate action." "We request that this issue be treated with the utmost seriousness, and that appropriate action be taken after due verification of the information provided. We would also appreciate being informed of the outcome and any measures taken in this regard, to ensure the safety of all competitors and uphold the integrity of the sport," ITPF mail read.

According to sources, the ITPF has also refused to allow Tarsem to appear in a judges' course being conducted alongside the Jordan event after objections were raised by fellow participants. —*PTI*

# China bans 73 persons from soccer for life

BEIJING, 29 JAN

China banned 73 persons from soccer for life on Thursday and deducted points from nine top-tier clubs in its latest anti-corruption campaign.

Former national team coach and Everton player Li Tie and Chen Xuyuan, former president of the Chinese Football Association (CFA), were among those banned.

"For 73 industry personnel, including Chen Xuyuan and Li Tie, whose criminal offenses have been confirmed by effective judicial judgments, the CFA has imposed lifetime bans on participating in any football-related activities," a CFA official said.

In 2024, Li — who managed the national team from 2019 to 2021 — and Chen were convicted of accepting millions of dollars in bribes. Li was sentenced to 20 years in prison, while Chen received a life term.

Nine Chinese Super League clubs were also punished with point deductions and fines. —*PTI*

China's former national football team coach Li Tie -PTI